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HINTS TO MY YOUNGER FRIENDS

REV. GORDON CALTHROP, M.A.



Hints to my Younger Friends.

A GROUP OF SERMONS,

SELECTED FROM THOSE ADDRESSED TO THE YOUNGER
MEMBERS OF HIS CONGREGATION

BY THE

REV. GORDON CALTHROP, M.A.,

*Vicar of St. Augustine's, Highbury New Park,
London.*



E. A. STOREY,

87, NEWINGTON GREEN ROAD, ISLINGTON, N.

1877.

100 . q . 530 .



TO

JOSEPH FREDERICK COLEMAN, ESQ.,

TO WHOSE

CONSISTENT INTEREST AND KINDNESS,

AS A

CHURCHWARDEN AND A FRIEND,

BOTH THE

DISTRICT CHURCH OF ST. AUGUSTINE'S, Highbury;

AND THE VICAR OF IT

OWE SO GREAT A DEBT OF GRATITUDE,

THIS LITTLE VOLUME OF

Sermons,

PREACHED IN HIS HEARING,

IS DEDICATED IN ALL AFFECTIONATE REGARD

BY THE

AUTHOR.

October, 1877.

P r e f a c e .

OR some years past the Author of this little volume has been in the habit of preaching once a month to the Young People of his congregation. From the Sermons thus delivered a selection has been made and put in print, in the hope that some of those who heard, and some of those who did not hear, may be induced to read. Nowadays sermons are so numerous, that it is only a few preachers who can secure, on anything like a large scale, the attention of the Public. Should, therefore, this little volume achieve anything beyond the usual success of such ventures, the Author will be very agreeably disappointed.

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Who has the words of Eternal Life?

JOHN vi. 67, 68.

"Then said Jesus unto the twelve—will ye also go away? Then Simon Peter answered him—Lord I to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life."

BROM the context of this passage we find that our Lord had been preaching a sermon in the Synagogue of Capernaum. The theme of His discourse had been Himself; and He had openly announced His claim to be regarded as "the Bread of Life," Whom God had given for the salvation of the world. This announcement excited considerable opposition on the part of many who were present on the occasion. It

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seemed to them a preposterous thing for a man with whose antecedents they were, or supposed themselves to be, perfectly familiar: whose father and mother they knew, and who had been for years an artisan in a neighbouring village—to represent Himself as coming down from heaven. And they inveighed in no measured tones against the folly, or fanaticism, or impiety involved in such an utterance. Undismayed, however, by their murmuring, the Saviour, as you will remember, proceeded to expand His original statement in language which seemed to His hearers more startling and shocking than any which He had employed before. He spoke of giving His flesh for the life of the world—He spoke of men's eating His flesh and drinking His blood—and He asserted, with a distinctness of emphasis which admitted of no misinterpretation, that the eating His flesh and drinking His blood was the one sole condition on which it was possible for human beings to attain to everlasting life.

Now we must not suppose for a moment that the Jews who were listening to the Saviour took His words in their bare and absolute literality. These Jews were accustomed to the use of figurative language, and they knew perfectly well that underneath the startling outward expression lay a spiritual thought, which they were required to accept. They understood the Saviour's meaning ; at least in part. They felt that He was speaking about a mysterious living union with Himself, and not about mere eating of flesh and drinking of blood. But it was precisely this inner meaning which gave them so much offence. So long as Christ claimed to be a teacher sent from God, and nothing more, they were not altogether indisposed to admit His pretensions. It was when He went beyond this point, and represented Himself as the dispenser of eternal life—it was then that they considered themselves justified in withholding their assent, and in raising objections.

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Amongst the hearers on the occasion we have been describing, were certain disciples, men *i.e.* who had openly joined the ranks of the Saviour's followers, and who had been under the influence of His teaching, perhaps for a considerable time. These men partook of the general discontent; indeed, so much so, that they decided to sever their connection with Christ, and to quit Him altogether. It was more (they said) than they could stand. They had been very thankful for the instruction they had received. Certainly Christ spake as never man spake, and if He had been contented to remain in the region of intelligibility and common sense, they would have been only too glad to have remained there with Him. But now they cannot go on with Him any longer. He tells them that a living union with Himself is the one sole condition on which they can hope to be partakers of eternal life; and this strange, fanatical doctrine is what they neither can nor will accept.

They foresee that the time of parting must come, sooner or later. It had better come now. And accordingly (as the sacred writer informs us) “they went back and walked no more with Him.”

It was under such circumstances as these that the words of our text were spoken. A great defection had taken place in the ranks of the Saviour’s disciples, and perhaps for the moment the Apostles themselves, influenced by the strong current of popular feeling, were inclined to waver.

If it were so—the voice of their Divine Master recalled them to their duty. As He spoke, they felt that, to forsake Him, would be to forsake everything : to turn their backs upon all the bright hopes they had begun to entertain, and all the nobler aspirations they had begun to cherish. This, they cannot consent to do. It is true,—they are puzzled. This new doctrine has startled them, as it has startled others. It is true, that when they see wiser and more learned men than them-

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selves repudiating their Master's teaching, and scoffing at it, as mystical and absurd—they cannot help being uncomfortable. Still: with all this difficulty,—to go away from Christ will not mend matters. They have no one else to go to: no one that they can trust and believe in: no one else has the words of eternal life. And so, they express themselves by the mouth of Simon Peter—"Lord," to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life: and we believe, and are sure that Thou art that Christ,—the Son of the Living God."

If this be the right interpretation of the passage before us, it suggests three, somewhat important thoughts. First, that *what we really want*, are the "words of eternal life. Then—that these words of eternal life, are to be found with Christ, and Christ alone. And lastly, this being so, that we ought not to be deterred from cleaving to Christ, either by the fact that there are difficulties in His doctrine, which we cannot explain: or by the other fact,

that the current of popular feeling set strongly against Him.

Let us consider these three thoughts, in the order in which they occur.

I. First then—what you and I, what all human beings, really want—are words of eternal life. Now, we are sometimes informed, that the wisest thing for us to do, is to give no thought to any life beyond that which we are now living in the flesh: but to shut ourselves up, as it were, between the cradle and the tomb, and to know nothing beyond. To this advice, it may be sufficient to reply, that man, in all ages, has ever found it impossible to do so. There are certain facts in the world: evil; suffering; death; which we have to confront; and there are certain questions arising out of the presence of these facts—which, at some time, or other—we have to find answers to. How shall I atone for the evil I have done? Where shall I find consolation in my distress? Such, and

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such like questions must arise ; and must be met. It is all very well to talk as some people do, but, if you exclude all consideration of an existence above and beyond the present—how are you to deal with cases, which are of continual occurrence in this world ? Take, for instance, a man whose conscience is heavily burdened with some terrible crime ; or even with the recollection of an ill-ordered and wasted life. You have seen such people, I daresay ; or, if not, you can imagine them to exist. Now, upon your present hypothesis, *how* in the world are you to handle such a case ? Or, take, what is more common still, the case of suffering and death. Approach this sick chamber, where the poor sufferer, lies groaning in the horrible anguish of some incurable disease—what consolation have you got to offer him ? and how will you enable him to bear the additional trial of dark misgivings and atheistic fancies—which come thronging round his soul, in this hour of misery ? What

word of hope have you in your power to speak to him? Or, go to that household, on which the shadow of bereavement has recently fallen. Death has come in, unexpectedly, and taken away the prop and stay of the house: or the dearly-loved child, round whom the affections of the parents, had closely entwined themselves—what have you got to say? What comfort can you bring, if all that you recognise is the world that lies between the cradle and the grave? Why! you have literally nothing to say that meets the case; and the best thing that you can do is just to avoid such scenes, in which your presence would be felt to be nothing better than an uncalled-for and unwelcome intrusion.

I affirm then, that human nature craves for light to be thrown upon the problem of all problems—our destiny itself—our life: with its trials: its anguish: its disgraces: its falls: and the future that lies before us. We may say—"I will put such thoughts

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out of my mind, I will deal with certainties. My business shall be, to make the best of this present world, which I do know, and to leave out of the question the other world (if there be one), of which I know, and can know nothing whatever." We may say such things. Hundreds, I believe, do say such things. But, depend upon it, a time comes when such language proves itself to be the merest empty boast: times, when we ask for light: light on the mysteries that haunt us: light on the thick darkness, in which we find ourselves involved. And when I want to express in the readiest way this craving of the human heart, I say, that, what we desire to have—is, "the words of eternal life."

II. In the second place—we come to consider, where these "words of eternal life," are to be found. Now, brethren, I have the greatest possible respect, for what, in the present day—is usually called "science;" and I believe that the study of God's revelation of Himself in nature—is only second in

importance, to the study of God, as He is revealed to us, in the Person and work of His own dear Son. I believe also that a time is coming, (I hope it is coming soon)—when the two things, which are frequently thought to be antagonistic—Science and Religion—will be found to have been in reality, the truest and best of friends: and to have been converging, all along, to one point—in the manifestation of the glory of God. But, at the same time I would assert most emphatically that, though sometimes overlapping each other, the domains which Science and Religion respectively occupy, are, in the main, perfectly distinct and separate. And I assert also that much of what we have to lament in the present day—is traceable to the non-recognition of this important distinction. We leave to Science, her own magnificent sphere. Let her place her feet on the neck of the prostrate forces of nature, and enthrone man (if she can do so)—Lord of the material universe. Let her compel the sun to

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paint her portraits: and the lightning to carry her messages. Let her lay her railroads across vast continents; carry civilization into deserts; and bring together the ends of the earth. We have no objection: nay, we hail with joy every advance she makes: every triumph she is enabled to achieve. But, after all, there is a sphere, and a wide one too,—into which she cannot enter. In presence of the great mysteries of human sin, and suffering, and death—she is silent and powerless. And it is just here, mark you, that we want the most help. We might perhaps dispense with the many appliances, by which Science has added to the comforts of human life: and enlarged the domain of human ideas. But oh, to have no response, when we are racked with the pangs of remorse, or when we are tortured with disease, or when we are brought low by calamity, or when we lose those, who are near and dear to us: or when we ourselves are drawing nigh to the borders of the dark and

mysterious world beyond the grave.! Oh! what must it be, to hear no voice speaking comfort, no light to throw a single ray, upon the awful and impenetrable darkness ! And Science (need I say it?)—has never given: has never been able to give, to man—a single word of hope: of certainty: or of consolation. Now it is just here, that the domain of Jesus Christ, begins. He has thrown a light upon human destiny. By the revelation, which is Himself, He has shown us what God is: and what man ought to be: and how the two can be brought together. He has explained to us, as far as it is necessary for us to understand—the mystery of suffering, and of death. He has taught us what sin is, and has opened a way of escape from it. He has revealed God, as a Father, to those who trust Him and love Him ; and has brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel. He has disclosed to us a glorious heaven—in which every faculty of man shall find its fullest development, and its freest

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exercise. What more do we want? Nothing: as far as this world is concerned—and all may be expressed by saying, that He has “the words of eternal life.”

III. In the third and last place—our subject teaches us: that inasmuch as Christ, and Christ alone, has the words of eternal life—there is little wisdom in deserting Him, in hopes of finding somewhere else a better teacher, or a surer guide. Difficulties, there must be in religion. What wise man would not expect them—when he considers that we are as yet in the infancy of our being: and that we can discern only our own little corner (and hardly that), of the illimitable empire, and everlasting purposes of God.? Difficulties in religion there are intended to be: seeing that we are here in a state of probation, and seeing that unerring certainty, mathematical demonstration, would simply render that discipline an impossible thing. Were there no faith, there would

be no spiritual training. And besides the difficulties, there will always be opposition to Christ. Christ lies too fully across the path of human pride and human self-will for men not to wish Him out of the way, and not to try to put Him out of the way. It always has been so; it always will be so. Why should we be startled because men abler and more learned than ourselves do not believe in Christ? The words uttered nearly two thousand years ago might have prepared us to expect this: "I thank Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes." But these difficulties, this opposition, constitute no true reason for forsaking Christ. You have no reason for forsaking Christ, unless you have a good hope of getting elsewhere what you want, but cannot get from Him. But have you any such hope? Will human systems comfort you in suffering, console you in trial, enable you to meet death with

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cheerful expectation—in fact, make the painful problem of human existence a bearable one? Can human systems deal with the mystery of sin, and give relief to your wounded conscience? Why, it is almost absurd to ask the question. You know that they cannot. They scarcely even pretend to do it. They can unsettle you, and prevent you from hearing the answer which Christ gives, but they do not give you an answer themselves. No; you will not mend matters by leaving Christ. You will gain nothing but loss, by exchanging Him for other teachers; and in spite of the difficulties which religion presents, and in spite of the opposition which Christ has to encounter, it will be your wisdom to say, “Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life. We believe and are sure that Thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God.”

Belshazzar.

DANIEL v. 25.

"*And this is the writing that was written,
Mene, Mene, Tekel, Ugharsin.*"

ME shall read this chapter, the fifth of the Book of Daniel, with the most profit if we read it in connection with that which immediately precedes. The subject of the one is Nebuchadnezzar; the subject of the other is Belshazzar. The two men were not father and son, as the sacred narrative seems to imply, but grandfather and grandson; and the prosperity and greatness of the ancestor became the curse and downfall and ruin of the descendant.

Nebuchadnezzar stands out one of the most magnificent figures in the whole of Oriental history. A skilful and successful warrior in his earlier years,—as soon as he had overcome his enemies and settled his

throne upon a secure basis, he devoted the remainder of an unusually long life to the cultivation of the arts of peace. He became the greatest builder that the world ever saw. Even to this day—after the lapse of four-and-twenty centuries—there are lying in the neighbourhood of Bagdad, and in the adjoining cities, millions of bricks, every one of them stamped with this inscription—"Nebuchadnezzar, son of Nabopolassar, King of Babylon." Nebuchadnezzar devoted a great amount of care and pains, as might have been expected, to the capital of his empire. He surrounded it with three walls of unusual height, rendering it an almost impregnable fortress. He constructed the famous "hanging gardens," vast terraces, built upon arches and pillars, and so rising, one over the other, as to give, with their trees and shrubs and lawns, the appearance of a natural mountain. He reared the Temple of Belus. And, indeed, what with his public buildings and gorgeous fane and magnificent streets, no city of the modern world

(if ancient historians are to be credited) could give us more than a faint conception of what the Babylon of Nebuchadnezzar really was. Nor did he neglect works of even greater importance than these. By carefully contrived and constructed systems of irrigation, he watered the whole plain between the Tigris and the Euphrates, and made it as fertile as a garden. You may imagine, then, what the wealth of the people became under the rule of a monarch who was so strong to repel the aggressions of every foreign invader, who had so remarkable a capacity for developing the material resources of his country, and whose reign was protracted to such an unusual term of years. The Chaldeans grew to be rich and proud and profligate ; and the description we have of them in the Hebrew prophets is true to the life : "given to pleasure, dwelling carelessly, trusting in wickedness."

Well, God did not leave this powerful monarch unwarned of the consequences of his pride of heart. A dream is sent to him, which Daniel interprets. He

is told of a great calamity that will come if he does not “break off his sins by righteousness, and his iniquities, by showing mercy to the poor;” oppressive dealing with subject races, and cruel treatment of those who opposed or offended him, being, we presume, among the monarch’s most conspicuous faults of character. The warning, however, is not taken, even if it produced a temporary impression ; and the sacred narrative describes very picturesquely and powerfully the judgment which, consequently, was inflicted.

About a year after he had seen the vision, Nebuchadnezzar was walking on one of the terraces of his palace at Babylon. From the lofty elevation at which he stood, he could command a wide range of the country over which he ruled ; and as he gazed on the vast edifices which he had reared, upon the domes and towers, and spires and palaces, which rose in every direction around him, testifying to the wealth and prosperity of his kingdom ; and as his

eye travelled onward to the silver network of canals which veined the valley as far as he could see, and caused it to blossom like the Paradise of God,—his heart swelled within him with the exultation of an irrepressible pride, and he burst out with the words, “Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for the house of the kingdom by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty?” The exclamation had hardly passed his lips when the judgment of God descended. His reason was taken from him; he became a maniac, and was driven out from the companionship of men, until seven long, weary years had passed away. At the end of that time his reason returned, and with it came a far humbler frame of mind. Whether he was thenceforth a true worshipper of the true God, we cannot undertake to say. It seems likely; but the evidence is not conclusive. At all events, the current of his feeling was changed; his whole tone was altered, his pride was subdued, his heart softened; and

the chapter ends with the touching acknowledgment—very touching, as coming from such a man—“Now, I Nebuchadnezzar praise and extol and honour the King of heaven, all whose works are truth, and his ways judgment: and those that walk in pride he is able to abase.”

We step over the interval, not a very wide one, which separates the fourth from the fifth chapter, and we find ourselves in the midst of a different scene. The old man is dead, and his grandson is on the throne; and the pride and ungodliness which had been characteristic of Nebuchadnezzar in his worst days are about to be reproduced in uglier forms in a man of a very different and very inferior stamp.

We have a portrait of Belshazzar given by one or two heathen historians, as well as in the Book of Daniel, so that we can form a tolerably accurate idea of what the man was like. He came to the throne young; and he was only a young man, though old in profligacy and sin, at the time when

the events occurred which are narrated in this chapter. He succeeded to his grandfather's kingdom, at least to the part of it in which Babylon was situated, without trouble. He had not to fight for his crown ; he had not to protect his kingdom from enemies, or to lay the foundations of the wealth and prosperity of his country : all this was done for him ; and he simply entered into a vast inheritance, which the valour of others, and the foresight of others, and the patient labour of others, had prepared for him. It is a great trial for a young man, with the hot blood of early life running in his veins, and with a keen appetite for pleasure clamorously demanding gratification, to become the possessor of as much money as he is able to spend, to find himself in such a position that every one around him is subservient to his will, and slavishly ready to minister to his slightest caprice. Nothing but the presence of the grace of God in the heart will help such a man to come

scathless out of the trial. Belshazzar succumbed to it. He surrounded himself with profligate young men, who lived luxuriously, and squandered their money upon dress and ornaments, and banquets and late suppers, and theatrical entertainments, and worse things still, and melted out what little manhood remained to them in the hotbeds of pleasure and self-indulgence. What would befall a nation under such a ruler as this, with such examples as these, it needed no prophet to tell. Often has the spectacle been seen of the rotten carcase of one nation enervated by self-indulgence and lust coming into collision with the healthy body and sound nerves of another; and we know what the result has always been. Shall we wonder, then, that Belshazzar's effeminate Babylonians gave way before the onset of the hardy Medes and Persians, who swarmed in, from their simple homes and purer ways, to take possession of the soil?

As to Belshazzar himself, all historians combine

in painting his portrait in the blackest colours. Old Nebuchadnezzar had his failings — serious failings, too. He could be desperately cruel when his blood was up; he was proud, as we have seen—puffed up (as he might well be) with the idea that he was a sort of demigod upon earth; but he was a grand man with it all. There was a majesty and a force about him that are very striking. And Daniel himself recognized these features of his character. It is remarkable to see with what reverence, with what almost affection, the prophet of God approached the monarch when he had a painful message to convey to him. "My lord," he says, "the dream be to them that hate thee, and the interpretation thereof to thine enemies."

Very different (as you will remember) was the prophet's style and manner when he denounced the approaching downfall and death of the degenerate grandson. Belshazzar seems to have been just a mean, brainless sensualist—one of those poor, miser-

able fools who come into a great inheritance, and then, laying the reins on the back of their lusts, post to perdition as fast as ever they can. He was violent in his temper, and yet easily managed; soft and pliable as wax to those who understood how to manage his caprices. Humour him, flatter him, yield to him, and he was the pleasant companion—the king who would lay aside his royalty to mingle with the pleasures and pursuits of his subjects. But cross and thwart him, even by accident—offend him even in the slightest degree,—and his womanish face would darken with the ferocity of a demon, and you would find his wrath as cruel and as insatiable as the grave.

By this time the kingdom was fast ripening for destruction. And God's avenging instrument was the famous Koresh, or Cyrus, acting, in this instance, under the directions of Darius the Mede. The city of Babylon was invested. But what did Belshazzar and the Babylonians care? They had

stalwart soldiers yet, or what seemed such; and it would be long before the war-engines of those days would batter down or penetrate the triple wall which Nebuchadnezzar had built. And as to famine, why, that was secured against. There were countless stores of food within the walls of the city. And besides, the city was not like a modern one, barren and unproductive, and dependent upon the supplies which come to it from without. It had acres upon acres of cultivated ground within its ramparts. Let the enemy invest until he is tired! Provisions will never fail the people of Babylon!

Now, we read in ancient historians that, after besieging the city for a time, the besiegers suddenly disappeared. When the Babylonians, on the walls of the city, looked out for their tents, not a vestige of the foe was to be seen. Perhaps a more thoughtful people would have anticipated danger; but the pleasure-loving folks

of the Chaldean metropolis jumped to the conclusion that the enemy had raised the siege in despair, and immediately gave themselves over to all manner of riotous excess. The guards deserted their posts; the gates in the palace walls and the river-banks were left open; and no notice, apparently, was taken of the fact that the waters of the river which ran through the city were rapidly sinking, and that the bed of the stream, in some places, was actually dry. Belshazzar the King made a great feast; a thousand of his lords were invited. The people kept feast also. There was eating and drinking, dancing and merry-making, in every direction. The people thronged the streets. The flames of idolatrous sacrifice rose high into heaven from the lofty Tower of Belus. The hanging gardens were hung with lanterns and torches, till they seemed like a mountain of fire. Torch-light processions flowed, like rivers of flame, through the broad streets, and the blue Chaldean

heavens looked black in the blaze of the great illumination.

Turn we now to the scene of the banquet. It must have been something inexpressibly magnificent. The hall, we are told, was adorned with carvings and sculptures of colossal dimensions. On the walls were engraved the records of the triumphs of the Babylonian kings. Huge censers sent up their cloud of perfume into the air, and innumerable candelabra cast their light over the richly attired company. And the monarch, surrounded by all the splendour of his court, looked for once every inch a king; and no one would have thought that the end was so nigh. As the evening wore on, and the mirth became fast and furious, Belshazzar gave orders that the golden vessels which had been taken out of the Temple at Jerusalem should be brought into the banqueting-room, and used for the revellers. His orders were obeyed, and the king and his princes, his wives and his concubines, drank in them. They

drank wine, and praised the gods of gold and of silver, of brass, of iron, of wood, and of stone. It was a bold step,—this bringing in the golden vessels consecrated to the service of the Lord. Nebuchadnezzar had never dared to do anything of the kind. Nor, probably, would even Belshazzar have done it if he had not been heated with wine. And, besides being a bold step,—it was the last step. The cup of the monarch's iniquities was now full. It wanted but this impious aggravation of his former crimes to shut the door of mercy hopelessly against him. Presently a blazing light, a light which dimmed the brightness of the candelabra round it, was seen upon the wall, obscuring the flattering legends of the king's magnificence, and drawing all eyes irresistibly in its own direction. A silence like that of death fell upon the company. Their tongues clave to the roof of their mouth. Sobered by the awful sight, they gazed with horror on the bodiless hand as it came forth and inscribed its flashing characters, and then

withdrew into the darkness from which it had emerged. Was it not a bad dream? No. The blazing letters remained there, as if waiting for an interpreter. But who shall interpret them? Well, you remember how Daniel was sent for, and came; and how, standing up boldly before the king, he accused him of his crimes, and prophesied the speedy downfall of his kingdom: "God hath numbered thy kingdom, and finished it. Thou art weighed in the balances, and found wanting. Thy kingdom is divided from thee, torn from thee, and given to the Medes and Persians." Whether Belshazzar sneered at the divine message, or whether he trembled, conscience-stricken, before his approaching doom, we are not informed; but this is certain, that at the very time when the prophet was speaking, Cyrus, who had diverted the Euphrates into a new channel, was marching his troops, over the dry bed of the river, into the city; and almost before the grey dawn of morning

had fallen upon the cups, and garlands, and spilt wine, and disordered furniture, and guttering torches of the late scene of frantic revelry, Belshazzar lay a corpse on the floor of his own palace, and the banners of the Medes and Persians floated over the stronghold of the last of the Babylonian kings.

The lessons of such a narrative are obvious enough, and they are very solemn. We need not be kings to learn them. It is a wretched thing, and a terrible thing, so to live as that men shall say of us, when we have passed away, "Don't live as *he* did." This is all that can be said of Belshazzar now. He is only a warning. And whose experience—at least, if he has seen anything of the world—does not supply him with similar instances? How many have we, perhaps, not known who, through various causes—some through strong drink, others through debauchery, some suicides through the utter despair caused by infidel opinions, others through the greedy pursuit of worldly success—have brought themselves

down early to unhappy, unhallowed graves, and on whose tombstones one might well write the epitaph, "Don't live as *he* did"!

"Mene, mene, tekel, upharsin"—"numbered, weighed, divided." That is the meaning of the words. God lets sinners run the length of their tether. He does it in mercy, purposing to bring them to repentance. But there is a time fixed for them; and when that time has arrived, when their cup is full, He steps in, and brings them to judgment. Their days are numbered; they cannot overstay the time by a single hour. So far He lets them go, and then He stops them.

And very serious and solemn, too, is the lesson conveyed by the second mysterious word. It is as true of us as it was of Belshazzar of old, that God is continually weighing our character, our conduct, our motives, in a balance of truth. Men of business sometimes tell us that it is impossible for a man to be perfectly upright and

honest in the midst of the competition of this great metropolis. Well, of course, I do not know ; but this I do know, that God is continually weighing in a balance the actions of daily business-life. This I do know, if men are found wanting—wanting in truth, in fair-dealing, in sincerity, in uprightness, in integrity—God will know it ; and, depend upon it, for these things He will one day bring them to judgment. And, oh ! let us lay the lesson to heart, all of us, ministers and people,—ay, ministers as well as people—let us lay it to heart, and bethink ourselves what an awful thing it would be to be found wanting in the last great day of final account—to be found wanting in the spiritual life—to be found wanting in love to Christ—to be found wanting in the image of the Saviour—to be found *wanting* in that character which alone can make us meet for the enjoyments and occupations of Heaven ; and then to be *divided* from the presence of God and the com-

pany of holy men, and the brightness of the celestial inheritance, for ever! God, in His infinite mercy, grant that this may never be the portion of any one of us who are here present before Him in the house of God to-night.





If not for Christ, then against Him.

LUKE xi. 23.

"*He that is not with me is against me: and he that gathereth not with me scattereth.*"

UR text, as you observe, divides mankind into two distinct and antagonist classes— placing in one of them the friends, and in the other of them the foes, of the Lord Jesus Christ. The chief importance to us of the statement thus made consists in the fact, that there is no intermediate standing-ground or neutral position between the two which we are at liberty to occupy. We may seem to ourselves to be holding aloof from the great contest, and casting the weight of our influence and character into neither scale; we may imagine that,

though we do not side with the Saviour, yet we certainly are not chargeable with enmity to His person, or with opposition to His will: but so it cannot be. To one or the other of the two great contending parties we must assuredly belong. If not friends of Christ, we must be foes of Christ. If not "with Him"—with Him by oneness of feeling, by identity of purpose, by affection for His person, by adherence to His cause, by self-consecration to His service—we must be against Him, standing in the dark ranks of His malignant adversaries, and with them desiring the confusion and overthrow of His spiritual kingdom.

Our subject, then, is of a peculiarly practical kind; and should there be any amongst us who know in their own hearts that they have not yet given themselves to the Lord Jesus Christ, it shuts them up to the necessity of an immediate decision and an immediate choice, inasmuch as the relation in which they now stand to Christ is one of un-

conscious opposition and dislike to Him, one that will expose them to the overwhelming storm of His anger and indignation if they be still found in that position in the day when He cometh forth from His silence to execute vengeance upon the opponents of God.

I must ask you to remember also, Christian brethren, that the text (which is a saying or statement of our Lord Himself) divides itself into two portions. In the former of the two the character or inward life is described; in the latter, the outward expression or manifestation of that inward life. First you have those who are "with" Christ contrasted with those who are "against" Christ; then you have the work of the one, which is "gathering," contrasted with the work of the other, which is "scattering abroad." With the question of the inward life, and the fact that that life must take one of two forms, must side itself with one of two antagonist parties, we are not at present concerned. We take up

the second clause of the statement of the text, and consider with you the significance and importance of the concluding words: "He that gathereth not with me scattereth." In order to draw out the lessons which this latter part of our text is intended to teach us, it is necessary that we should ascertain what is the meaning of the expression, "gathering with Christ ;" and this, without further delay, we will attempt to do.

I. Now, I think we may venture to say that the Bible, and more especially the New Testament, represents the Saviour as engaged in the work of gathering together, out of a world that lieth in opposition to Him, spiritual materials, and constructing and weaving those spiritual materials into a perfect and harmonious and glorious whole. In the pages of the elder Revelation we frequently find imagery in which the setting up of the kingdom of Messiah is described as the erection of a temple. From east and west, and south and north, the living stones are being

brought. Drawn up from the darkest and most unpromising quarries, they are fashioned into proper shape, and polished, and then the builders build them into the wall ; and the structure rises in its majesty and its beauty towards completion, towards the rejoicing and exultation of that time when the top stone of the building shall be laid, with shoutings of “grace, grace upon it.” And the imagery thus originating in the Old Testament is perpetuated, with even greater force and emphasis, in the New. Many are the passages in which the whole body of believers is compared to a temple ; and many are the passages, too, in which a work of selection is implied: some, to whom Christ is offered, “stumbling at the word, being disobedient ;” and others coming to Christ in simple faith, being made by that act of coming “living stones,” and being fashioned into a “spiritual house,” to the praise and glory of God.

I know not that it will be necessary for me to multiply quotations ; those which have been adduced

will be sufficient to show that the work of the Saviour in the world is represented in Scripture as a collecting of certain materials, and a fashioning and a shaping them into a certain spiritual structure, chiefly for the purpose of the setting forth of His own character, and for the manifestation of the glory of God. Thus, then, I think we are in a better position for understanding the expressions of our text. The work of Christ is, in fact, the work of gathering souls, the work of building up, step by step, piece by piece, His spiritual kingdom. For the accomplishment of this mighty undertaking Christ employs the services of human agents. Men are to be labourers together with God, builders together with God, workers together with God. Every act, then, of ours by which the advance of this spiritual kingdom is facilitated is a "gathering with Christ," and every act of ours by which the advance of this kingdom is retarded is a "scattering abroad."

Now, in order that we may be able the better to

realize the application of the text to ourselves, let us be careful to bear in mind that spiritual occupation and spiritual employment are not to be considered the exclusive possession and privilege of the ministers of the Gospel. It is, or it used to be, the impression with many, that, just as we leave it to the artist to paint us our pictures, to the baker to provide us with bread, to the husbandman to secure us the due succession of the fruits of the earth, whilst we ourselves go our way, to be busied with our own peculiar engagements, and to contribute our own share, in some other fashion, to the comfort and prosperity of the general body,—so the care for souls, and the love for souls, and the watching for souls are to be left entirely and exclusively to the ordained ministers of the Lord Jesus Christ. Whether this idea does or does not maintain its ground amongst us now, thus much is certain, that there is no warrant to be found for it in Holy Scripture. Scripture tells all Christians that they are “kings and priests unto God.” It bids them

recollect that they, not the ministers only, but they, the common and general body of believing people, are set apart as “a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.” And if we wish for something even more explicit and distinct than this, we may find it in one of the Epistles to the Thessalonians, where the Apostle, after speaking of the duty which believers owe to those “who are over them in the Lord, and admonish them,” passes on to address these words, implying the existence of an obligation to spiritual employment, to the general body of Christians in Thessalonica : “Now we exhort you, brethren, warn them that are unruly, comfort the feeble-minded, support the weak, be patient toward all men.” We admit, of course, that to the pastor, in a more especial manner, belongs the care of souls. He stands up in the congregation, time after time, an ambassador for Christ, to proclaim the divine overtures of reconciliation and the divine offer of pardon to sinful, erring men, and to win, if he can, souls for the Saviour ; he

watches, or he ought to watch, for souls as one that shall give account ; but though he stands foremost, he does not stand by himself ; though on him rests the greatest share of the responsibility, he is not alone in the responsibility. And all Christian people, by the fact of their allegiance to Christ, and by virtue of the love which they bear to their Divine Master, are bound to do what in them lies for advancing the interests of the Redeemer's spiritual kingdom.

And if it be asked, how, in what way, by what means, people who are necessarily immersed in the active business of life can put their hands to spiritual work, and "gather with Christ" in the task of gathering souls, the answer we have to give is obvious enough. Let us do what we have to do *in the name of Jesus Christ*, and we become immediately and necessarily spiritual agents. There is not one of us, Christian brethren, but exercises some degree of influence over others, whilst some exercise very considerable influence. "No man," saith the

Apostle Paul, “liveth unto himself.” He cannot do so. Even if he withdraw himself from active life altogether, and shut himself up like an anchorite in a cave, still, by the very circumstance of his withdrawal, he has something to do with forming the characters and moulding the feelings of others. And knowing as we do, brethren, how soon and how certainly the leading principles of a man’s life, the general tenour and bias of it, become matters of notoriety to those about him, can we allow ourselves to doubt that men who import a true Christianity into their daily occupation—wh^o, perhaps, without dealing very largely in religious phraseology, yet manifest in their doings the mind and spirit of Christ—who are upright and conscientious, for Christ’s sake—who are kind and gentle, and lenient and forbearing, for Christ’s sake—who shrink, as from the face of a serpent, from the thousand meannesses, and trickeries, and subterfuges, and evasions, and dishonesties of which daily life is so full, and do it all for Christ’s sake,—can we doubt that such persons as

these are the centres of a wide-spread Christian influence, and do much, very much, for the advancement and furtherance of Christ's spiritual kingdom upon earth?

Brethren, let us believe in the force of Christian example. It is more to preach with the life than it is to preach with the lips; and in this respect a layman may, perhaps, be even more useful than a minister of the Gospel. The clergyman is fenced round with professional decencies. The sharp, scrutinizing eye of the world is continually upon him; he is under a measure of restraint wherever he moves. Then, again, he is accustomed to the handling of sacred things. Men expect him to say certain words at certain seasons, to rebuke profanity if uttered in his hearing, to offer spiritual advice, to administer spiritual consolation;—all this they look upon as his business, his profession, as that whereby he subsists and lives; and, therefore, upon some minds the Christian mould into which the life of

a minister of the Gospel is necessarily cast, fails to produce any very lasting or any very considerable effect. We think little of things which a man must do, of words which a man must speak, whether he is sincere about them or not. With the layman, however, who is a true servant and disciple of Christ, the case is different. His worldly companions and associates see a man placed in the same circumstances with themselves, experiencing the same feelings, encountering the same difficulties, exposed to the same temptations, and yet, obviously, acting upon a different principle, and regulating his conduct by different maxims. They see that he is living for one end, and they for another; they see that whilst they are serving self and seeking the world, he is the servant of the Lord Christ. And the knowledge of the difference cannot but produce a considerable effect. That man is a witness for Christ, a spiritual agent for Christ. It may be that in many cases he will stir up opposition and incur dislike, but

it may be, also, that in many other cases he will exercise a Christian influence, an influence for good, and thus be found, in deed and in truth, to be “gathering with Christ.”

But I would go a step beyond this. It seldom happens, brethren, that those who put forth by their life what we may call a passive Christian influence are contented to rest there, and to do no more. To such persons opportunities of exercising a direct, active Christian influence are seldom wanting; and they, on their part, are seldom found slow to avail themselves of the opportunities. Show me a man whose whole intercourse with the world is regulated by Christian principle—who, in the midst of the keen competition of business, or politics, or professional pursuits, does not forget that he belongs to Christ, and that the glory and the credit of the Saviour are, in a measure, confided to his keeping,—show me such an one, and I will show you a man who lends his help, his sympathy, his personal service,

to those undertakings which aim at the extension of the Redeemer's kingdom—a man who will do what in him lies to bring his children and dependants and friends to the knowledge of the truth as it is in Jesus Christ. The two things go together. Our lives are, really, all of a piece. And the principle which induces us to order our outward conduct according to the law of Christ impels us also to open confession of Him, and to active exertion for Him, as occasion presents itself. And thus it is, brethren, that he who is "with Christ" in heart and mind is always to be found "gathering with Christ."

II. And now let us turn to the other statement contained in the latter part of our text: "He that gathereth not with me scattereth." I said a little while ago that every act by which the advance of Christ's spiritual kingdom is retarded is an act of scattering. The meaning, then, of the text is this, that if our life is not such as to help forward the work of the kingdom, it must be such as to hinder. We do

either one thing or the other. If we do not assist, we oppose ; if we do not advance, we retard ; if we do not strengthen, we weaken ; or, in other words, if we do not gather with Christ, we scatter abroad. Let us consider this statement a little more closely ; let us ask the question, How do we, by remaining in unconversion, by remaining in indecision, by remaining at a distance from Christ, and refusing to give ourselves to Christ, how and in what sense do we “scatter abroad”?

In the first place, *we scatter ourselves*. It is one of the effects of sin that it introduces disorder and confusion into the being of man. The unconverted man is at war with himself ; often unconsciously, I grant, for the real state of the case requires certain circumstances in which to display itself—just as a fatal disorder may lurk unsuspected in the constitution, but come out if we change our climate or alter our mode of life. Still, the fact remains the same, that man, in his natural, unrenewed condition,

is at war with himself. He is not satisfied, he is not at rest ; his conscience is not easy, or, if easy, is only sleeping. His will is perverted. He is setting his affections upon the wrong things, and seeking happiness from sources from which he cannot possibly obtain it. All these things are the indications of a state of spiritual disorder and disorganization which sin has introduced. On the other hand, it is one of the effects of the grace of Christ received into the heart, that it restores harmony to the being of man, and unites together the warring and contending faculties. Order is brought back ; the lower nature is placed in subjection to the higher ; the will is rectified ; the conscience is put into its rightful position of supremacy ; and the man is made happy, because he is made at one with himself. Now, if all this be true, it is obvious that so long as we hold aloof from Christ, so long we perpetuate in ourselves the spiritual disorder which sin hath introduced. Christ alone can heal the

malady, and bring back the lost harmonious action of the soul; Christ alone can enthrone the conscience in its rightful supremacy, and cause the violent impulses of our lower nature to hold themselves in subjection to the word and will of God. And we will not come to Christ, that He may do this for us. Therefore, whilst we abide at a distance from Him, refusing His invitations and turning a deaf ear to His promises, the terrible work of spiritual disorganization is going on rapidly within our souls. Matters—already bad enough—are becoming, by every act of indecision and delay (which is, virtually, an act of rejection), still worse. The will is becoming more wilful, more perverted; the affections are twining themselves more resolutely round those things from which, one day, they will have to be torn if ever we are to find happiness and peace. The sensitiveness we may have once had is fast departing; the little light which may once have shined into our souls is fast waning and

becoming dim. In fact, our spiritual being is dissipated, not united : torn and distracted by many contending faculties, each aiming at rule, we are “scattering” ourselves, because we refuse to come to Christ, that He may give us peace—peace with ourselves and peace with God.

But more obvious still than this is the influence for evil which those who are not “with Christ” exert on all around them. I need not speak of the open sinners, the vicious and the profligate ; I need not speak of the avowed infidel or sceptic. The evil these men do—by example, by influence, by word, and by deed—is patent to all, and acknowledged by all. But I speak of those whose lives are orderly, and whose characters are above suspicion ; and I am bold to say, upon the authority of my text, that the influence which the unconverted man exerts upon the world round him, let him be as excellent outwardly as he may, is an influence exerted against, and not for, the kingdom of the Lord Jesus

Christ. Can you not, for instance, imagine, brethren, a young man hesitating upon the point of a sincere and thorough dedication of himself to Christ? The decision trembles in the balance. It may be for, it may be against ; and perhaps this is the turning-point of his life. The Spirit is dealing and striving with him as He will never deal with him and strive with him again. The young man looks round him. He knows certain open sinners, but they do not influence him ; their lives show what they are—that they are against Christ, not for Christ. He is aware that there are infidel writers and infidel writings in the world ; but this, again, does not affect him. Such persons, he knows, are pledged to their opposition to Christ. Their judgments are biassed, their passions are enlisted against the Saviour and His kingdom, and any statement of theirs would produce but little impression upon his mind. But in looking round him, the eye of the young man falls upon one whom he well knows and greatly respects—

a man of high character and sterling integrity—a man generous and open-handed, and free from meanness—a man whom every one respects, and of whom every one speaks well, but a man who makes no pretension to religious feeling, and no profession of faith in Christ. There our inquirer pauses and reflects. He sees that, to all appearance, a man may have many excellences and many noble qualities, and not have given himself to Christ ; he sees that one whom he cannot but look up to for many reasons, satisfies himself with a decent formality, with occasional attendance at God's house, with a certain external reverence for holy things ; he sees that, combined with the possession of many good qualities, there is no profession of faith, no self-surrender to the Saviour, no devotion to His service, no communion, no fellowship with Him, no love for prayer, no thirst for the knowledge of God's Word. And what is the effect upon the young man ? Why, that it decides him against Christ. Either he thinks

this step, to which preachers are continually urging him, a totally unnecessary one, or one which he will himself take some other day, when he sees the object of his respect and his admiration taking it. And so the time of softening, the time of good impression from the Spirit of God, passes by unimproved.

Now, I say, brethren, that in such a case as this—and it is one of frequent occurrence—the unconverted man of high character whom we have been imagining is chargeable with the moral mischief which he has done to his brother ; I say that he has been exercising an influence which is in opposition to the influence of Christ, and that his case is a proof of the truth of the statement of our text, in which Christ says, “ He that is not with me is against me : and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad.”

Deeper into this part of our subject I must not enter now. This only allow me to say, Christian

brethren,—that it is one of my profoundest convictions that the most dangerous and deadly enemy to the Church of Christ is to be found in the practical unbelief of nominal Christians. We are very timid about the assaults of infidels—we are very fearful when those to whom we think we have entrusted the defence of the faith turn against it and undermine the very doctrines upon which we have built up our spiritual hopes; but I will tell you what we should fear more—the seeming respect, but real indifference, of professing Christians; the formalism which satisfies itself with outward observances, and practically contemns and despises the oneness of feeling with Christ, and the giving of the heart to Him; the eager running after worldly gain and worldly distinction, and slighting of those things which God has prepared for them that love Him; the spirit which contents itself with the very smallest modicum of religious observance which it deems consistent with spiritual safety, and which

never dreams of being earnest, of being diligent, of being self-denying, for the sake of Christ, and for the sake of the kingdom of Heaven. Yea, brethren, let us fear these things, for they, above all other things, are impediments to the progress and growth of Christ's kingdom amongst us.

Finally, brethren, consider what a solemn thought it is, that in almost every congregation, and perhaps amongst ourselves, a deep and real line of demarcation must be drawn—not by us, but by God—and that on the one side are arranged those who are with Christ and who gather with Him, and on the other side those who are against Christ and who scatter abroad! What a fearful idea—to be against Christ, to oppose Him, to resist Him, to hate Him! And yet this is our condition if we are not with Him. What a fearful idea—to be scattering abroad, to be undoing, as far as we can, the work which Christ came down to earth to do! And yet this is our state if we are not gathering with

62 *If not for Christ, then against Him.*

Him. God reads the heart, not we. There may be none amongst us to whom the warning of our text applies; there may be some. Oh, if so, would that they could be induced not to remain in that condition! would that they might be persuaded to give themselves to Christ, by simply taking Him at His word, and crediting the testimony of the Spirit concerning Him! "Behold," He says, "I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and sup with him, and he with me." Let a man, whatever has been his past, just listen to this assurance, and accept it: then he passes over at once to the ranks of the Saviour's friends. No longer against Christ, he is with Christ; no longer scattering, he gathers with Christ, and aids in His work.

Sinners Detected at Last.

PSALM i. 4, 5.

"The ungodly are not so: but are like the chaff which the wind driveth away. Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous."

ROUGUES and impostors are not always found out in this life,—I wish they were; but they are found out sometimes, and when this happens it is a subject of unmixed rejoicing to every one who is in harmony with that righteousness which is the mind of God. Mawkish sentimentalists pat a villain on the back and say, "Poor fellow!" when the poor fellow smarts for his iniquity. Should we have patience with such feebleness? *Feebleness?* It is worse than feebleness, for it is sympathy with evil, and

shows that a man does not himself understand what sin is. The Word of God has no patience with this feebleness. “When it goeth well with the righteous, the city rejoiceth; and *when the wicked perish there is shouting.*” Ay, with all who are right-minded, with all who have wholesome consciences within them, with all who know how to distinguish the fearful discrepancy between good and evil, there is “shouting”—good, hearty, sound congratulation and thankfulness—when some deeply-laid plan of iniquity comes to grief, and some big impostor bursts, like a broken bubble, under the keen and piercing touch of the truth.

And why should we rejoice? Because the event is a proof that God has not left this world of ours to itself, but is still ruling amongst us. Every now and then God interferes and makes His presence and His working felt, just as if He said, “I am here! beware what you do! There will be a reckoning, presently.” But He does not interfere continuously. I remember, years and years ago, being surprised

at this. I remember one morning, on my way to school, going down a street in which, in a certain house, a murder had been committed the night before. I saw the crowd gathered, the awed faces, the eager talk,—can recall the event as if it had taken place only yesterday ; and I thought that the murderer would, sooner or later, be sure to be brought to justice. But the murderer was never brought to justice. Every nerve, I believe, was strained to discover the perpetrator of that foul crime ; but the matter remains, to this day, as great a mystery as it was when I passed, years ago, a school-boy with my school-books in my hand, down that dismal street. Since then I have learned a lesson, and it is this,—that God does not see fit to bring all evil-doing to judgment in this life, but that He interferes often enough to enable us to anticipate what is coming. He gives us, occasionally, what we may call “little judgment days,” smaller disclosures of iniquity in order to prepare us for that great day in the future, “when he shall bring every work into judgment ;

with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil."

You will guess, I dare say, why I have selected such a topic to speak about. This morning being the first morning of the month, gives us the first Psalm as part of the service for the day, and I felt that the coincidence was too striking for me to pass it altogether by without notice.

But now let us consider the text itself.

The Psalmist, who is supposed to be King Solomon, draws a deep and broad line of demarcation between two classes of mankind—the righteous and the ungodly; in fact, he only does what was done after him by the Apostle of love—distinguish between the Church and the world. He describes the righteous, the godly, first. What does he say about them? First, he speaks of them negatively. He tells us what they do not do. They do not walk in the counsel of the ungodly. They do not stand in the way of sinners. They do not sit in the seat of

the scornful. Notice, I pray you, the gradation here; and notice, I pray you, young people, that everything in God's universe proceeds by gradual stages. You hear of a man who has collapsed in business. It seems sudden ; it is nothing of the kind. It has been prepared for for years. You hear of an unexpected attack of disease. You think it sudden ; it is not. It has been gathering for months and months past, and has only now come to a head. So in spiritual things. Some of you are not what you used to be. Remember the time of your confirmation, and the months and perhaps years which succeeded that time. How far are you removed from your then spiritual condition ! and how far less happy are you now than you were then ! You used to relish prayer ; you do not relish it now. The Bible is dull ; once it was not so. You used to come to the Lord's Table ; now you are never there. Well, the process has been a gradual one—hasn't it ? You have drifted into your present con-

dition you hardly know how. It began by littles, it went on by littles ; and here you are ! But there is nothing sudden and unexpected about it. It has been a gradual process. So, the ungodly man gets to his ungodliness by degrees. First he listens to the tempting voice of bad companions ; then he joins them, and lounges about with them ; at last, he sits down in the seat of the scorner, and scoffs and mocks at holy things. The righteous holds himself aloof from all this. And here we have the negative part of his description.

Now for the positive part. It is comprised in one statement, but that is a significant and a comprehensive one : " His delight is in the law of the Lord ; and in his law doth he meditate day and night." Brethren, if you want to test a man's spiritual condition, try and find out what use he makes of his Bible. There is no better test going. *A man is as he behaves to his Bible.* Now where is your Bible ? On the shelf, covered with dust, and only brought down on Sun

day, if then? or frequently in your hand? Which do you read most, your Bible or your religious newspaper? They tell me that "Sacerdotalism" makes great way amongst young people. Well, if so, I will tell you the cause of it. It is because they know little or nothing about their Bibles. No one, for instance, could accept the Priest-system who understood his New Testament. "What?" you say to me, "what do you mean? There are better men than you, wiser, abler, more learned, real scholars, students of the Scriptures, who believe heartily and entirely in Sacerdotalism, who preach it and practise it. What do you mean, then, by saying such a thing?" I just mean this. I grant their superiority to me, their immeasurable superiority, if you like. I have no objection. But I say, also, that in their case, human learning—the study of the Fathers, or something else—human learning, at any rate, has overlaid the Bible, and crushed the life out of it. And I repeat again, with all

the emphasis I can command, that the spread of religious error, if it be a fact, amongst young people is mainly attributable to such young people's utter and entire ignorance of the Word of God. The righteous man of our Psalm takes delight in God's will, and therefore in that which is the exponent of it, the Sacred Scriptures. They are his companions, his counsellors. He strives to make himself deeply acquainted with them. "His delight is in the law of the Lord ; and in his law doth he meditate day and night." And what is the consequence? That his life, being conducted on the lines which God has laid down, has an element of permanence about it. The work which he does is rooted work ; it will last, it will abide, it will not pass away. "He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season. His leaf also shall not wither, and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper."

Now let us turn to the case of the ungodly man. There

is no endurance about him ; he lasts but for a time. There is a show, but no solidity. Sooner or later, his emptiness, his unreality, are discovered. The godly is like the well-planted tree, planted by the rivers of water, with a plentiful supply for his roots, even in the drought of the summer months. His leaf does not wither ; his fruit comes regularly and abundantly. All is right, because there is reality, because the man is in harmony with the Divine will. But the ungodly are like the chaff on the threshing-floor—empty, useless, mere refuse and waste, fit to be burnt up, or, at least, to be driven away into space by the blast of the summer's breeze. “The ungodly are like the chaff which the wind driveth away.”

But let us consider this more closely, and let us take the light of recent events to guide us. I notice two things : first, that there is a power in evil, in untruth, in unreality ; then I notice 'that in the end, in the long run, evil is sure to be defeated and overthrown.

I. You may take for granted, my younger friends, that never any evil passes current in the world, without there being with it, mixed up with it, the appearance at least of truth. Take heresies, for instance. If they were wholly untruth, they would not stand for a moment. It is the grain of truth that is combined and incorporated with them which enables them to live and to do mischief. The only living thing in the world of mind, is truth. Falsehood is a dead thing. But you may mix the two up together so cleverly, so that the dead thing shall do mischief through its association with the living thing. Evil, then, or untruth (for they are pretty much the same, evil consisting in deviation from the Divine will, in being untrue to God's laws), evil or untruth derives its strength, its power, from its likeness to the truth, or from its being connected and associated with the truth. And it has a mighty power,—for a time. In the first place, it draws round itself accretions of those persons who partake of its nature. Our Lord said, in words well

known to you all, "Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice." He refers to those who are true-hearted, who love righteousness, who hate falsehood, who desire to know the truth of things and to be in accordance with the truth of things. Such persons hear Christ's voice, recognize it, and obey it. But I think the Devil might say, if he were allowed to speak, "Every one that is of falsehood heareth my voice." He might say, "Let me start a lie in the world, and every false, every insincere, every unclean and selfish nature will, by an irresistible instinct, be drawn together, and grouped around it." Evil, then, I say, has great power in this way for a time. But it has great power in another way. It can attract to itself not only the meaner spirits of men, the men whose god is their own selfish appetite, the men who stick at nothing to gratify self—but it can attract also, by its speciousness, far nobler spirits than these. Men of a far higher stamp, men worthy of all respect, are often misled by the glitter of

falsehood. Wanting, perhaps, in the right spiritual instinct, yet honest of purpose, they take the seeming for the real, the tinsel for the true, solid metal. Thus evil, untruth, acquires a constituency, large sometimes and influential—a constituency, however, composed of two very different ingredients—of those, on the one hand, who have an affinity with the falsehood, and of those, on the other, who are honestly mistaken as to the real nature of the enterprise in which they are engaged. This, I venture to think, is an emblem of all error: it draws round it adherents of two different kinds; it becomes powerful, it endures, it lasts, it energizes, it does mischief,—for a certain time.

II. Our second thought is this, *that it lasts only for a time.* Sooner or later, the day of its exposure and overthrow comes. All shams break up at last; all bubbles, however bright their colouring, burst; all frauds are exposed. Well, not all here, I suppose; but all, certainly, in that great day of revelation



which is coming; and we see enough of God's dealings now to understand what He will do then. And I wonder whether you have noticed, my younger brethren, in what a curious way some of these bubbles of religious error burst. There is an old saying, "Give a man rope enough, and he will hang himself;" and I know of no better way of confuting an opponent of the Gospel than by allowing him to live long enough to follow his doctrines out to their legitimate consequences, and so to furnish, himself, a practical refutation of them. It seems to me that *when God wishes to make a man's infidelity as harmless as possible, He lets him live to write his autobiography.* I wish all errorists could be induced to write their autobiographies. It would do far more for Christianity than whole libraries of books on the Christian evidences. Let men see what it comes to, what it leads to; let them see it, not in clerical descriptions, which may be suspected of exaggeration, but in the state-

ments of the men themselves. Get infidels to write their autobiographies ; it is the best thing that could be done to neutralize the influence of their books. Look at the conclusions at which these men arrive ! A French unbeliever rejects Revelation, and ends by worshipping his wife. A German unbeliever begins by applying to the Gospel narrative an intellectual solvent, which he thinks will crumble it all to powder, and ends in his latest work with proposing the worship of what he calls an “universum.” What is that ? you say. Why, he tells us this universe is only matter in motion, and the highest product of this matter in motion is man ; but inasmuch as this matter in motion has traces in it of order, and law, and regularity, and something like moral purpose,—it is to be the object of our devotion and adoration. We are not to worship a personal God, for there is no such being, he tells us ; but we must bow down before this universe, and take it into our hearts for adoration and love. “Professing themselves to be wise, they



become fools." God grant—I say it again—that every unbeliever of our day, if he does not live to repent, may at least live long enough to write his autobiography, provided he does so honestly! Well, sooner or later, by intellectual suicide (such as I have just been describing), or in some other way, the strongest and compactest systems of error and falsehood are overthrown and destroyed. Some may last longer, others for a shorter time; but, sooner or later, all fall. Nothing stands but what is based upon righteousness and truth—nothing stands but what is in accordance with the will of God. The ungodly, and the systems and fabrics erected by the ungodly, "are like the chaff which the wind driveth away."

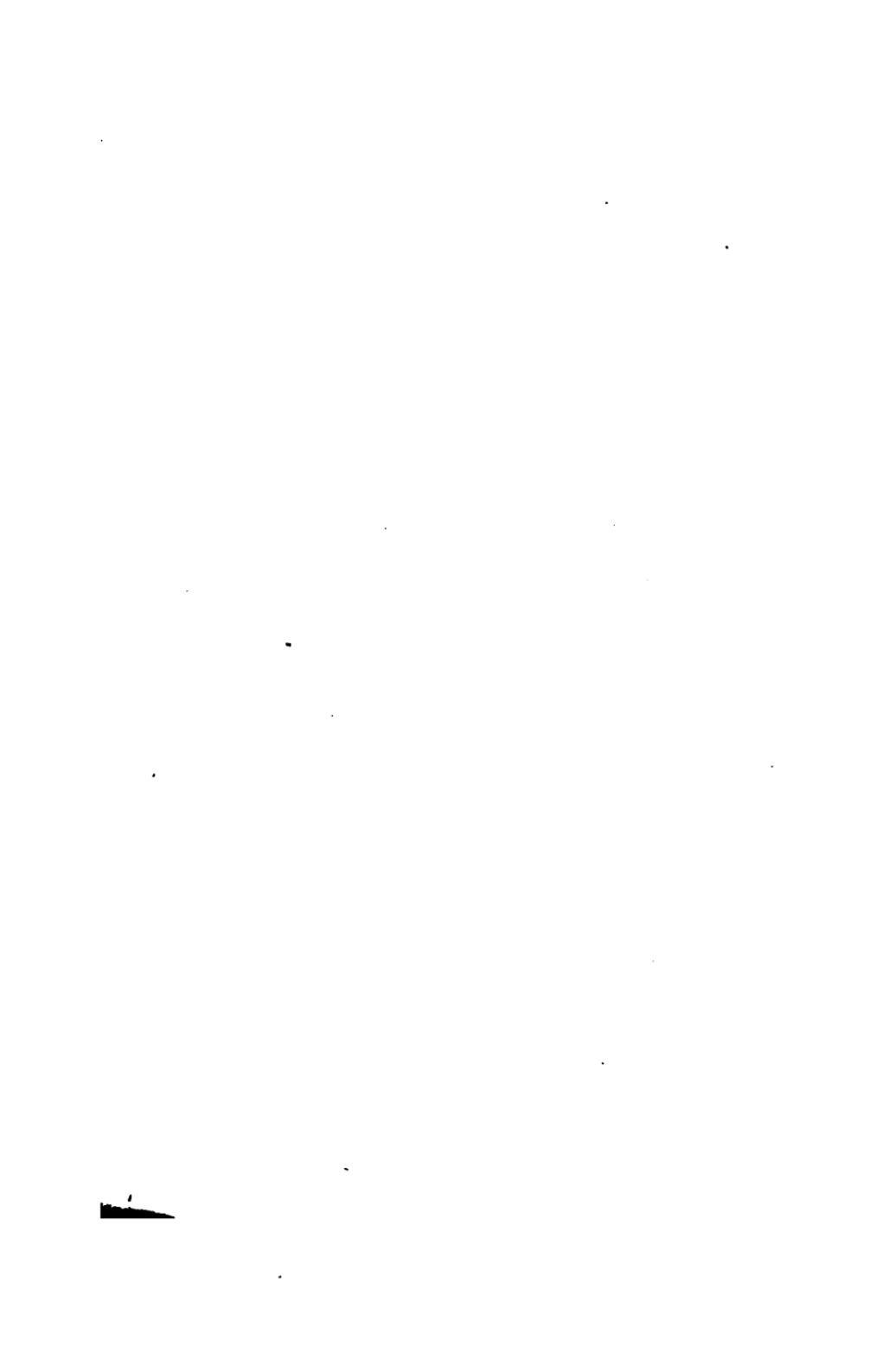
III. Young people—young men especially—take two parting words from me. First, this—you are beginning life, or comparatively beginning life; and many whisper to you that you cannot thrive if you adhere to the rules of strict integrity and uprightness. You must stretch your conscience a little, they say,

if you expect to prosper in London. Don't believe it, I beseech you,—however much appearances may seem to be in favour of the statement. Who rules in this world, the Devil or God? Well, if you believe that the Devil does, *go in for the Devil*,—only go in heartily; do the thing with your whole mind and soul. But if you believe, as I am sure you must, that God rules in the world, believe with your whole heart and soul that it is well to be on the side of God. He knoweth the way of the righteous. The man who serves and fears Him shall prosper, probably in pocket, certainly in his soul. And what is the good of having a large balance at your banker's when your soul is lean and hungry and miserable and starving? But the way of the ungodly, though he may seem to prosper for a time, shall perish.

My last word is this. No man's work is permanent, unless he stands in a personal relation to Jesus Christ. You must link yourself on to eternity if you wish to endure; you must have your root *there* if you wish

your "fruit," the results of your life, to abide. In other words, although honesty, uprightness, fidelity, truth, reality, tell for this world, they do not, if alone, tell for the world of the hereafter. Only by personal union, through the Spirit, with the personal Jesus Christ—only by thus becoming possessors of spiritual life—can we become like the trees planted by the rivers of water, whose leaf will not fade, even in eternity, and who will bear fruit for ever in the Paradise of God.





Baptism.

GALATIANS iii. 27.

"For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ."



HERE are few questions, as you are probably aware, which have so divided men's minds, and raised such bitter and almost inextinguishable animosities, as the question of Baptism. The dispute, however, has chiefly concerned the baptism of infants; when we come to the case of adults, the greater part of the theological difficulties vanish, and, as a consequence, a greater unanimity and a greater charity begin to prevail. To-night I am going to speak about Baptism. The subject has been suggested to me, of course, by the ceremony which has just taken place in the church. I was very thankful when I found that the young man who has

just been baptized was not disinclined to present himself at the font at the time of one of our public services ; for although it is not a pleasant thing to be the centre of general observation, yet it is clearly right to make such a profession of faith openly ; and it is clearly an advantage for one who is about to take so important a step to have the prayers of the praying people who are present on the occasion ; and I judge from what I saw that many, very many, were lifting up their hearts to God, that the young man might obtain the fulness of the blessing conferred in baptism when it is rightly received, and might go forth from this house of prayer strengthened for that conflict with the “world, the flesh, and the devil,” to which he has committed himself before you to-night.

Our Church appoints that baptism should be administered in public—partly, no doubt, for the reason just alluded to, but partly, also, for the sake of those who stand by and witness the ceremony ; for it is well that we should all be reminded of what our

baptism implies. Baptism is not a mere empty ceremony. To be baptized, is not merely to be distinguished by a certain mark from those who are not baptized, but it is a privilege and a responsibility. It represents to us, as our service says, "our profession, which is, to follow the example of our Saviour Christ, and to be made like unto Him ; that, as He died and rose again for us, so should we who are baptized die from sin and rise again unto righteousness, continually mortifying all our evil and corrupt affections, and daily proceeding in all virtue and godliness of living." And to be reminded of this occasionally, must be a great advantage to us all.

I was thankful, then, I say, when my friend made up his mind to be baptized in the course of the evening's service ; for his determination gives me the opportunity of speaking about an important subject. I do not intend to enter upon controversy in any shape or form, except the old controversy with the evil that there is in all of our hearts ; but

we will occupy ourselves with statements about which almost all will be agreed, and with practical conclusions drawn from the statements, which I trust we may all of us find useful to ourselves.

Now, it will throw some light, I think, upon the subject, if we refer to the history of Saul of Tarsus. For three days, we are told, after the Lord met with him on the road to Damascus, the future Apostle was "without sight, and did neither eat nor drink." His mental agony was intense. The whole mistaken, sinful past rose up before his mind. The blood he had shed, the blasphemies he had uttered, all his bitter opposition to the Christ of God, all his malignant and pertinacious dislike of Him Who had died for him, and Who was even then drawing him with the cords of love—all this came crowding into his thoughts in these hours of darkness, and the recollection nearly drove him to despair. Three days he passed in this condition, enduring the horror of seeing himself without seeing Christ. He felt that he was a sinner,

justly exposed to the tremendous wrath of God. He felt not, as yet, that he had a shelter and a hope, as having a personal Saviour in this very Jesus Christ against Whom he had sinned. But at last, the days of physical and spiritual darkness drew to a close. And how was the conflict terminated? Not by the exhaustion of his feelings, nor by his passing, unaided, into some new phase of religious sentiment, but—as I am sure you will remember—by his receiving the rite of baptism. A man came to him, “one Ananias,” with a message from God. The message contained this exhortation—“Why tarriest thou? Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord.” Saul obeyed the words, and seems to have entered at once upon a new region of light and life and joy. He received meat, he was strengthened, and immediately he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus was Christ.

Now, unless I am much mistaken, this experience

of the Apostle gave a colour and a force to all his subsequent teachings on the subject of Baptism. Of course, he was the last man in the world to attach any importance to an outward sign, unless it was accompanied by the thing signified. No one had such perfect scorn and contempt for mere externals as the Apostle Paul. Paul was at the farthest possible remove from being a worshipper of charms, or a believer in the magical efficacy of an outward rite or a form of words. "He is not a Jew," he cries, "which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision which is outward in the flesh: but he is a Jew which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God." "In Christ Jesus, neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature." And therefore, when he speaks of baptism and its effects, he always understands that there has been an antecedent work of the Spirit, in repentance and faith, in the case of the person who

has been made partaker of the blessing. The mere baptism of itself is nothing; indeed, if unaccompanied by spiritual receptivity, it is worse than nothing. But where there is true repentance and true faith, and, as a result, true readiness to consecrate oneself to the service of Christ, there the act of baptism marks a transition-point; nay, is more than that,—it is the *means of transference from the state of condemnation to that of living union with Christ, and of sonship through Him, in relation to God.* The work is already begun, but baptism completes it.

Let me give you an instance in point. If you read the writings of this Apostle with any attention, you soon discover what is his view of the Christian life. It is the life of one who is united to Christ by the possession of the same Holy Spirit, and so united, so completely made one with Christ—not in a figure, but in most true reality—that he is to regard himself as having passed through all that Christ has passed through, as having died in the death of Christ, as having risen in

the resurrection of Christ, as having ascended in His ascension, and as now having "his conversation or citizenship" in Heaven, because Christ, his Head, is there, seated at the right hand of the throne of God. But what was the precise moment, according to the Apostle, when this mysterious union took place? What was the precise act which brought it about? Or, in other words, if I had been a Christian man in Paul's day, what event should I have to look back upon, as fixing the date from which I might reckon the beginning of my living connection with the Lord Jesus Christ? Undoubtedly my baptism. For so says the Apostle: "Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death"—*i.e.*, "our baptism, by which we were united to Christ, was, like burial, a solemn act of consigning us to death, in order that, as Christ rose again from death, so should we, in this world, live as men who have already died and risen again."

And with this corresponds, I think, the statement in the Twenty-seventh Article of the Church of England : “ Baptism is not only a sign of profession and mark of difference whereby Christian men are discerned from others that be not Christians, but it is also a sign of regeneration, or new birth, whereby, as by an instrument, that they receive baptism rightly (mark that word “ rightly ”) are grafted into the Church ; the promises of the forgiveness of sin, and of our adoption to be the sons of God by the Holy Ghost, are visibly signed and sealed ; faith is confirmed, and grace increased by virtue of prayer unto God.” Let us take this statement to pieces. First, observe that it refers to those only who receive baptism *rightly* ; observe that it presupposes repentance and faith—both of them the gift of God and the work of the Holy Ghost. This fact disposes of a good deal. It disposes of all mere form ; it disposes of the opinion of those who attach any mysterious efficacy to the mere act of the sprinkling of water, accompanied by

a certain formula of words, by a certain person. Very well, then, the baptism spoken of being the baptism of those who receive it rightly,—what does it mean? “It is a mark of distinction.” Certainly. It distinguishes Christians from non-Christians; it is the brand which the Great Shepherd stamps upon the sheep of His pasture. “It is a sign of profession.” Yes. Men who are baptized have put on, as it were, the uniform of their Saviour-King, and are bound to fight, under His banner, against His enemies and theirs. Certainly, it is this, too—it is a mark of distinction, and it is a sign of profession. But it is more than these: it is a sign that the man is regenerate. *That* is a great deal more. When I see a baptized man, his baptism having been “rightly” received, I see one who is a follower of Christ and a soldier of Christ, and also one who is born again of the Spirit, who is a child of God, a joint heir with Jesus Christ. So far we see our way clearly enough. Now comes another question. “Baptism,” you say, “is a sign, and an important one;



is it anything more?" Yes, it is. It is an *instrument* which the Holy Spirit employs for the purpose of grafting the true believer into the living Church; or, to change the image, it is like the seal put to a document to make it complete and binding. You understand the figure, of course. A property is made over to you; it is to be yours; that is quite settled. The deed which is to put you into actual possession of the property is prepared, is drawn out in legal phraseology; all is ready, all is done, except the signing and the sealing. But, until this signing and sealing takes place, you cannot lay your hands on the money. You may call it "yours" if you like, and in a sense it is "yours"; but you cannot use and enjoy it. So is it with baptism. The promises are yours already, the promises of forgiveness and of spiritual adoption, but you cannot lay hands on them and say "They are mine" until the spiritual document has been "signed and sealed" by baptism. Yet, again, to these advantages of baptism our Article adds another: that

“faith”—*already existing*, you will remark—“is confirmed, and grace increased by virtue of prayer unto God.” It is impossible, I think, to give a better account o baptism ; and it seems to me to amount to what I said above, that baptism, rightly received, is not a mere form or a mere sign, but a point of transition and a means of transference from a state of legal condemnation to a state of living union with the Lord Jesus Christ.

You will readily see the applicability of these remarks to the young man who has been baptized to-night. He has received the ordinance rightly, as I believe ; he has come to it with repentance and faith, and with a deep desire to devote himself to Jesus Christ, to acknowledge practically Jesus as his Lord. If this be indeed so, you will see that he has passed, in consequence of having been baptized, into an altogether new state. Before his baptism he could not say, “I am united to Christ as a member of His mystical body :” he can say so now. Before his

baptism he could not say, "I know that my sins are forgiven :" he can say so now. Before his baptism, he could not say, "I know that I am a son of God by adoption, and through the power of the Holy Ghost :" he can say so now. He has entered into a new state of spiritual position and privilege, which it must be his care, God helping him, to abide in, even to the end. "Abide in me," says Christ, "and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine, no more can ye, except ye abide in me."

Our text, which I must discuss very briefly, mentions one of the privileges to which the baptized—the rightly baptized—attain : "As many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ." "Have put on Christ"—*i.e.*, ye did in your baptism, then and there, "put on Christ." Now, what is this imagery intended to teach us? It refers, of course, to the putting on of a robe—perhaps to the wedding garment of the king's guest

in the well-known parable. And you will notice the form of it. It is not said that we put on Christian principles, or that we put on Christian practices, or that we put on Christian sentiments and feelings; but that we "put on Christ." I learn two lessons from the phrase—one of encouragement, the other as to our duty. When a man puts on a garment of this kind, enveloping his whole person with its ample folds and its magnificent ornamentation, what the eye of the spectator beholds is not the man himself, but the robe in which he is shrouded; and when we thus "put on Christ," what God sees when He beholds us with His all-searching eye is not ourselves, with our failures, our imperfections, our blemishes, our sins,—but it is Christ. God sees Christ, and in Christ, and for Christ's sake, accepts and blesses us. That is the lesson of encouragement. Now the lesson as to our duty. Again, picture to yourselves the eye resting upon the baptized man, but this

time imagine that it is the eye of the world, not the eye of God. What is the eye of the world to behold in us who are baptized? Christ. Not so much Christian principle, as Christ. We are to live Christ, think Christ, speak Christ; and what the observer is to notice in us is not ourselves, but Christ. I do not mean by "thinking Christ," that we can always, or often, have our minds directly turned to the Saviour; but that the heart, the thoughts, the affections, should have a natural and instinctive reference to Him. I do not mean by "speaking Christ," that we should interlard our conversation with texts, or obtrude our religion upon others, in season or out of season; but simply that our life should be so permeated with the influence of the blessed Saviour as that that influence should be felt in our ordinary intercourse with the every-day world. I know it is difficult for young people to manifest themselves before others. They are naturally reserved; they are self-dis-

trustful ; they are very fearful of being, or of appearing, unreal ; they would rather—but this is a folly and a vanity, and a cause of sin—be thought worse than they are, than give an occasion to others to charge them with hypocrisy. Nevertheless, believe me when I say that a quiet, steady, consistent Christian character will make itself felt and respected in the long run ; and that if a man has really “put on Christ,” Christ will be sure to be seen and acknowledged in him at last.

But how about those who have been brought to the knowledge of the truth—“converted,” as we call it—in their later years? Are they to be baptized again, or else forfeit the blessings of which we have been speaking? Not so. The Church Universal recognizes only “*one* baptism for the remission of sins.” We know of no second baptism. What then? Is the baptism in their case nothing—a mere idle, ineffectual ceremony? Indeed, it is not. In such a case as that we are

speaking of, the persons *realized their baptism at their conversion*. Then it took effect, then it became a living reality, and not a dead form ; and then the Spirit of God, through whose gracious operation they became living souls, grafted them, by means of their long-past baptism, into the living body of the Lord Jesus Christ. “I believe in one baptism for the remission of sins.” And if there are any amongst you to-night who feel something of this kind, “Well, hitherto, I am ashamed to say, I have not been living as one who has put on Christ, baptized man though I be,”—I would ask him to encourage himself in better feelings, in earnest seeking of the grace of Christ, by the recollection of his baptism. Baptism implies, at least, love and mercy and good-will on the part of God towards you. And this was the very argument of Peter with the Jews, who had crucified Christ: “Repent ye, and be converted.” Why? on what ground? Because ye are not

outside the covenant, but inside it; because your Jewish descent and your Jewish privileges speak of the loving-kindness of God towards you. "Ye are the children of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers. . . . Unto you first God, having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities."

I cannot conclude without expressing an earnest wish and prayer, in which many will join, that he who has to-day "put on Christ" by being baptized before us, may continue steadfast unto the end. The fascinations of the world are very powerful. Young people are under especial temptation to deny Christ, and to be ashamed of Him. The fervour of early love and devotion is apt to cool. There is a danger, then, of drifting away from the position in Christ which we have once occupied, or have seemed to occupy. Sad instances of this drifting away from Christ and returning to the

world, sad instances of baptized persons acting as if they were unbaptized, may be found in this very congregation. Not a few who stood up at Confirmation, in the presence of God, to renew their baptismal vow, and who were doubtless sincere at the time, have practically forgotten their vow, have turned their back upon Christ, and are giving themselves to the world. Prayer neglected, the Holy Communion forsaken, pleasure or business keenly pursued,—how different is their course from that which they so solemnly promised to follow! And oh! how bitter, how crushing, will be their condemnation, except they repent! It had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them. From all such backsliding may the young man baptized tonight be kept! May he stand fast in the Lord, and in the power of His might! May he persevere unto the end, and at last, his race run, his warfare ac-

complished, hear the welcome words, “ Well done, good and faithful servant; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord !”



The Divine-Human Book : Our Duty towards it.

EZEKIEL ii. 9.

"And when I looked, behold, a hand was sent unto me ; and, lo, a roll of a book was therein."



F all the men who have had to suffer for the possession of privileges, the most to be compassionated are the ancient Hebrew prophets. And I think that when we read the writings of some of them, and observe the constant complaints they were obliged to make—the unvarying, or almost unvarying, messages of denunciation which they were commissioned to deliver—the contempt and execration which they received from the people over whose well-being they yearned,—we shall be inclined to say, "It must be a magnificent thing to be charged with a message from God, to come down with burning

words amongst the children of men ; but, for all that, I am very thankful I am not a prophet."

Now just look at the chapter from which my text is taken. Ezekiel is being sent with his message to Israel. Is his task to be a pleasant one? Pleasant ! He is told that he shall be like a man cast amongst briers and thorns, like a man who has his dwelling with malignant and stinging scorpions. The people to whom he goes will be impudent and stiff-hearted ; they will mock at his message, they will deride his denunciations, they will jeer at his promises ; their heart is as hard as the nether millstone. His preaching will produce no impression whatever upon them, and all the consolation he has (though it certainly is a great one) is this : that the Lord will stand by him, and strengthen him, and fill him with courage to fulfil his mission. Unhappy Ezekiel ! Who would willingly take Ezekiel's place, even to have Ezekiel's marvellous eloquence, and wealth of imagination, and power of prophecy ?

At the close of the chapter (you will remember that the prophet is seeing a vision) a hand is sent to him, with a roll of a book in it. He is commanded to eat the book—that is to say, to let the contents of the book enter into him, and become part of himself. I wish to make use of this statement; and to connect with it teaching which perhaps does not properly come out of it, but which I, nevertheless, believe to be scriptural and true. In short, brethren, this is the line which I am anxious to take with you. A book, commonly called the Bible, is sent to us, professedly from heaven, but brought by a human hand. We are commanded to let that book mix itself up with and interpenetrate our being. Have we obeyed the command? or have we been rebellious, as Ezekiel was cautioned not to be, and refused to obey it?

Now, Christian brethren, there is no use in shutting one's eyes to the fact that there is amongst us, in the present day, and perhaps especially amongst young men, a growing distrust of the Word

of God. It is not so much proved as taken for granted, that the progress of modern criticism and of modern science is incompatible with the acceptance of the Bible as a revelation from Heaven. Now, it would ill become me, or any other minister of the Gospel, to speak slightingly of science, or of scientific men. We have no desire to do so. We should be mad to do so. All truth, we believe, is from God ; all truth is precious ; and the deepest respect, we believe, is due to scientific men for their earnest, resolute seeking after truth for truth's sake, and for their intense dread of falsehood and error. So far as that goes, they show the very spirit that ought to characterize the Christian. The Christian is a man that desires to know the truth of things—the truth about himself, the truth about man, and the truth about God. But at the same time, brethren, we very earnestly protest—and we think we have a right to do so—against this taking for granted that the Bible is not trustworthy. And we think we have a right to

ask you, if you have ever seriously, earnestly, resolutely examined this question for yourselves. Have you ever really gone into it? have you grappled with the matter as with one that concerns your best interests here, and hereafter? have you given your heart and mind to the examination of the point? and then, having done so, have you come to the deliberate conclusion that the Bible is a mass of legend, and fable and human speculation, and that it is not, in any true sense, the Word of God? Many a young man whom I have in my thoughts now would say, if he were honest—"Well, no; I must confess I have not; I have never given much earnest thought to the matter." "Then what makes you doubt?" is the very natural rejoinder. "Why," he says, "I heard a very clever man, the other day, ridiculing the Bible, and saying that no person of intelligence, unless he had an interest in keeping up the superstition, believed in it any longer." Or, "I was reading a book not long ago, and it seemed to

me to prove that God, if there was a God, was unknowable; and as I felt myself unable to answer the arguments, I began to think that there must be something in them, and I discredited the Bible forthwith." Young man, I ask you, is this the way to deal with such a question? Suppose that, after all, this old Book should prove to be true—should prove to be a message sent to you from the living God; and suppose that you, having rejected its teachings, have missed your way, and, having based your soul and fashioned your life upon wrong principles, should find, when you pass into the next world (for the law of God is inflexible in spiritual things as well as in natural things, and everywhere we reap what we have sown), that you are out of harmony with that world, and therefore miserable: will it not be a source of bitterest reflection for you to feel that you never made anything like an earnest, honest, painstaking inquiry into the matter, but just drifted into the current of thought which you found

in the society about you? Brethren, I do protest very earnestly against this taking for granted, which is the mental attitude of ninety-nine out of a hundred of those who cast the Bible aside. Reject the Bible, I say, if you like, but be honest about your rejection—be truthful about your rejection—be able to say, “I gave that book a most careful examination, I came to it with as unprejudiced a spirit as I could, I looked into it thoughtfully, I gave time to it, I gave pains to it, I scrutinized the volume thoroughly, and now, before God, if there be a God, I do believe in my soul that the volume is a human compilation, and nothing more; I believe that its pretensions are false, and that it is not binding upon the human mind or the human conscience.” Be able to say this, and then we will give you credit for honesty, and integrity, and sense, and brains, and manliness; although we may regret the conclusion at which you have arrived.

“ But why,” some one says, “ am I to take all this

trouble—I, who have but little time to spare? why am I to give this earnest examination to the Scriptures?" I will tell you. *It is for your life.* If you are wrong here, you are fatally wrong. It is for your life; and a man will find time, somehow, to make himself thoroughly acquainted with that upon which his highest well-being depends. Why, you have time to hear and read about one side of the question; find time, then, to examine the other.

I will give you another reason why this question should be gone into thoroughly. There is a respectability, at least, about the old Book. It has some right to have its pretensions attended to. It claims to be from God. "Ah!" you say, "of course; it is not the only imposture which claims to be from God." Well, but many men—men like Newton and Milton, and Bacon and Shakespeare—men before whose gigantic mental stature the highest modern intelligence dwarfs into

pigmy proportions—have accepted it as a message and revelation from Heaven. At all events, *their* endorsement of the Book should secure it your respect.

Then, again, it is a book which has stood a good deal of attack, and it is extant still; and it is a power in the world, too. Had it been other than what we think it is, it would have crumbled away long ago. The keenest intellects, the sharpest criticism, the most ponderous learning, the bitterest scoffing, have all assailed it in turn, and that for two thousand years and more; and the fact that it remains still a living power amongst men seems to us to prove that it has a divine life in it, that it is instinct with the indestructible vitality of God. And, though others may not agree with us as to our interpretation of the fact, at least the fact entitles the Book to respect.

Again we say—and here we boldly challenge contradiction—that the man whose life is most in accordance with Bible-teachings and Bible-precepts is the highest type of man; that he is the purest, gentlest, most

loving, most self-denying, every way the best ; that he is the man who will sacrifice himself for others—the man to whom you may go for consolation in sorrow, and for help in your trouble—the man who will elevate your idea of what a human being, through God's grace, may become. We defy contradiction here. We say, unhesitatingly, that you do not find men good right through and good all round amongst your sceptics and infidels. And again, on this ground, we claim for the old Book at least this,—that its pretensions should be patiently and honestly looked into.

• And so we come round to the point from which we started. We say—“ You who have practically thrown off the authority of Holy Scripture, and who accept it no longer as a restraint to your conscience and a guide to your life, who do not believe its promises, or heed its warnings, or listen to its invitations, because, as you say, you regard it now as an untrustworthy document, putting forward pretensions which are not borne out by fact—have you proved all this? have you thoroughly

examined all this? have you, by painstaking, careful scrutiny, convinced yourselves of all this; or are you merely taking for granted what the general verdict of the society in which you move pronounces to be true? *Before God, brethren, have you ever really looked into the matter?*" Well, some of you say, "That's pulpit talk. Ever since the world began the clergy have been terribly afraid of the march of intellect and the spread of knowledge, and have taken advantage of their inaccessible position in the pulpit to make a howl about it." Well, then, hear a philosopher. Said Sir David Brewster—you know his name and his reputation—said Sir David Brewster, a short time before his death : "In the present day people fancy that they are free-thinkers, and that they are searching, with a thoroughly intellectual examination, into every subject which comes before them with reference to those questions which bear on the veracity of the Bible; but in the whole history of the world I don't think there was ever a period of time when men were more led by the

opinions of others." Again, he said, "I am not aware of any single proven fact connected with geology, or any other scientific fact, which in the slightest degree affects the truth of the Bible. I do not mean assertions, I mean real well-grounded scientific facts, founded upon pure and perfect induction, the premisses clear and distinct, and the inferences irresistible." And again, he said, "Every man in the present day has really and truly never read those works which are said to be so conclusive for the overthrowing of our faith ; but I have read them, and if other people would do the same, the result would be that they would be ashamed of being implicated in the advancement of views which are so utterly untenable by intelligent and philosophic minds." These, brethren, are the words, not of a clergyman looking at the subject from his point of view, but of a philosopher, a thorough-going scientific man. I shelter myself under these words when I speak of the danger of quietly taking for granted that the attacks upon Scripture

have been successful, and that no intelligent man can bring his mind really to credit the sacred record.

I was speaking this morning about the doubting of the present day—about the inability which some persons feel, or profess to feel, as to making up their mind upon the subject of religion. Now, brethren, there are doubters *and* doubtless. There are those whose doubts are honest, and there are those whose doubts are far from being honest; and I will give you a rule by which you can ascertain to which class you belong. Do you feel easy and self-complacent in your doubts? do you think it rather a fine thing—a thing indicative of a great, or, at least, a superior mind—to be sceptical? do you look down contemptuously, but with a mild and gentle contempt of course, upon those who are so much behind the age as to believe in Revelation? Is this the case with you? Then, I can settle the question for you without much difficulty. *Whatever you may doubt about, there is no doubt about you.* You belong to

the second class. You are not an honest doubter. The honest doubter is a man of a very different stamp. Is it pleasant to be undecided about the things which concern our inmost being, our true self—to be tossed, as it were, on a stormy sea, helplessly, without a compass, without a rudder, without a light, not knowing to what shore we are bound—to be uncertain whether this universe is a system guided by the loving will of a supreme Father, who makes all things work together for His people's good, or a vast and pitiless embodiment of law, a deaf and blind piece of gigantic mechanism, which rolls cruelly and calmly over everything that stands in its way, crushing human hearts and human lives beneath its resistless strength? Is doubt of this kind pleasant? No; the man who experiences it is not a self-complacent and comfortable, but an unhappy man. Himself in the waves, he envies, not scorns, those who seem to be standing on the solid rock. He would give worlds, if he had them, to

be rescued from his present state. With such a man one sympathizes. But your surface-scratching, dilettante, coxcombical, self-complacent sceptics, who have not a particle of earnest feeling in their whole composition, and who are only anxious to air their own importance and to draw attention to themselves;—why, it is nothing but the thought of the wretchedness which they are preparing for themselves and diffusing over others which holds one back from the most absolute scorn and contempt for their miserable and unmanly pettiness.

Pass we away, now, out of this atmosphere into another. I wish to say a word or two, in conclusion, to those who value their Bibles and use them. Brethren, do not be aghast when you hear that a book is coming out, or has just come out, which is going to overthrow the Word of God. I have heard that said a good many times in the course of my life, but I don't

think the Bible is much the worse. "People are the worse!" No doubt. Unstable souls, souls without the life of God in them, are swept away, like dead fish, down the current. Of course mischief is done. I never denied that. I only said that the Bible is none the worse. There it stands—living, strong, effective as ever! Remember, too, I pray you, that even if the Bible were overthrown, its opponents would gain nothing, but lose everything, because the facts of God's universe would remain precisely the same. *The Bible does not make those facts, it only gives its account of them.* I once heard of a little boy who was very anxious that the morrow should be fine, because he was going to have a whole holiday; accordingly, he went to the barometer, and with a piece of string, fastened the pointer of the barometer—the finger of the instrument which indicates the weather—at "Set Fair." After having achieved this feat, he thought himself secure of his holiday.

But, alas! the facts of the universe were against him, in spite of his ingenuity, and a heavy shower of rain fell all the day through, and spoiled his pleasure. And I think I know some clever people who are exceedingly like that ingenious little boy. They construct their theories about human nature about God, about the unseen world, about a future state; and they think they have made all secure by fastening up the pointer; but the spiritual world takes its course, and leaves them and their theories out in the cold. No; I say, destroy the Bible, and still everything remains the same—except that you have lost your guide. If a party of voyagers who are passing through a dangerous channel were to say, “Away with the chart! it is such a worry to be always looking at it; and it expects one to be so very careful, too; away with it; it’s a nuisance!” you might easily get rid of your chart; but the rocks and shoals, and sunken reefs, and all the perils of the channel would

remain there, just the same. Suppose a community were to say, "Banish your doctors. Let's have no medical books here, no treatises on disease. 'Throw physic to the dogs. We'll none of it!'" They could do that, of course, if they liked. But the laws and conditions of health and disease, of life and death, would remain precisely where they were before. And it is conceivable that men might get rid of the Bible. Practically, many do get rid of the Bible; but what do they gain? *Only the loss of a guide.* The facts of the universe, the facts about man and about God, the facts about the mutual relation of the one to the other, remain precisely the same.

Lastly, brethren, let us who profess to serve and follow the Lord Jesus, see to it that our very being —the very texture, the warp and woof, of our souls—is permeated and interpenetrated with the teaching of Holy Scripture. Remember, the prophet is to "eat" the Book sent to him. So with us. The Book, by the help of the Spirit, is to become part of our-

selves. We are to become, as it were, "living Bibles," the words translated into the actions and feelings of a human life. Then, brethren, some of the power that there is in Holy Scripture will be found in us; and we shall do some of its gracious work in consoling, cheering, instructing, guiding, and elevating our fellow-men.





When Proved, hold fast.

I THESS. V. 21.

"Probe all things; hold fast that which is good."



E are accustomed to say that the age in which we live is, emphatically, an age of inquiry ; and there can be little doubt that the statement is correct. Old beliefs, that have stood the test of centuries, are daringly called in question. Nothing seems to be too sacred or too venerable to escape the necessity of giving an account of itself. In every direction the solvent of criticism is applied to the accepted facts of religion ; and under its action, the spiritual structures in which men have for long found a resting-place and a home for their souls, are supposed to be crumbling to dust, and passing away. Now, there is a good side as well as a bad side to most things ; and you will see that there are certain

advantages to be derived from this prevalent spirit of the day. If we can get rid of unreality and conventionalism—if we can clear our hearts as well as our tongues of cant—if we can get beyond the “believing that we believe,” into the region of solid faith—if we can base ourselves on eternal, immutable facts,—it will be all the better for us, both for this world and for the next. And such a result is more likely to be arrived at in a time of intellectual activity than in a time of intellectual torpor and stagnation. But, on the other hand, you will notice also that there is a large amount of compensating peril in the tendency of the times. A spirit of reverence lies at the very foundation of the Christian character, and this is not likely to be fostered by the habit of mind which refuses to accept any doctrine except on the ground of personal investigation, and which treats every fact with suspicion until it has established its own particular claim and title to respect. To the influence of our own times we are all of us exposed. God

intends, of course, that it should be so. We must take the position in which we are placed, and make the best of it. It is here, in this nineteenth century, with all its failings and all its excellences—it is in this, and not any other, that our fight is to be fought, and our work is to be done.

And perhaps, of all classes of the community, those whom I address to-night are most susceptible of the influences of the time. I speak to young men. I know enough of them, and remember enough, to be perfectly sure that they take peculiar delight in the spirit of inquiry. And this for many reasons. In the first place, they are conscious of the unfolding and development within them of faculties and powers which in their earlier years lay comparatively dormant. Their energies are in full activity, and they feel as if they could grapple with and overthrow the world. It is well that it should be so ; for, if we have no springing vigour in us when we are young, what in the world shall we be like when we are middle-aged or old ?

Well, with this stirring strength within them, they are conscious that they must begin to think for themselves. Right enough! The man who is content to take at second-hand his deeper opinions, those which influence the current of his life, is not worth much, and will not do much in the world. He must work his opinions out, think them out, pray them out, act them out for himself. Then, again, young people are easily captivated by the seeming chivalry of those who come forward to attack established beliefs. They naturally side with the solitary champion ; their sympathy with dash and enterprise and boldness is called forth on his behalf. It seems a grand thing to stand alone and raise the hand, even though it be not against the fabric of error, but against the fabric of truth. Then, again, (may I say it?) young people are somewhat easily drawn into the belief that they are wiser than their seniors. The fact that their fathers advocated a certain view, is sometimes enough to stamp it with the brand of effeteness and superannuation. They, they think, have got beyond

the wisdom of the past. Well, there is a truth in this too, if rightly interpreted. Progress belongs to the young ; conservation of that which is attained belongs to the old ; and the young man naturally pushes forward into new regions of thought, whilst the older man, as naturally, remains, as it were, at home, and preserves and improves, strengthens and consolidates, that which he has already acquired. But, at the same time, it is usually found that experience gives wisdom, and that inexperience is not to be implicitly trusted to.

I remember an old story, in an old book, about a certain Hebrew king. Ascending the throne young, and finding himself placed in circumstances of peculiar difficulty, the king called round him his father's advisers, the men who had grown grey and wrinkled and bald in the work of administering the affairs of a mighty empire. He asked their opinion, and they gave it. But he was not satisfied ; the policy they recommended was too

timid, too cautious, too temporizing, to suit his hot blood and his ardent nature ; and he turned from them, with ill-concealed disgust, to hear what the younger men—his contemporaries and companions, with whom he had been brought up—would say. You will remember the advice which they gave—advice the very opposite of that of the elder men. It was very bold advice, very spirited and courageous advice, very “plucky” advice, as we should say ; but it cost Rehoboam ten fair provinces, and the sceptre that then was wrested from him by the crafty genius of his rival he was never able to get within his grasp again.

I am not going to trouble you with more reasons. You will admit, I am sure, that sympathy with an inquiring spirit is natural to young men ; and because it is natural, I believe it to be, within certain limits, and if kept in proper subordination, laudable and right. It is absurd, too, I am convinced, to suppose that the questions which are

agitating men's minds now are not discussed amongst young men. I know better; I know that they are discussed. And I know that books are being read, and read pretty generally, whose object seems to be to unsettle the foundations of our Christian faith. And therefore I have determined to consider with you as well as I can, and under the guidance of the precept of St. Paul, which I began by quoting, what are the limits to our national and legitimate indulgence of the spirit of inquiry. Our best way will be to begin by considering the context.

If you will be so good as to glance again at the passage, or to recall it, as you probably can do, to your recollection, you will observe that our precept, the precept with which we are concerned, follows a caution, on the part of the Apostle, against "quenching the Spirit" and "despising prophesyings." Now, you will remember that in the early Christian Church there were certain singular manifestations of the influence of the Spirit. Some men stood up in the

congregation and spoke with tongues ; others revealed mysteries ; others, again, poured forth, in streams of fervid and impassioned language, adoration and praise and prayer to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. There was something irregular and enthusiastic, of course, about such proceedings, and persons of a cold temperament or cautious character were inclined to do all in their power to throw discouragement upon them. It is against these discouraging efforts that the Apostle protests. "Quench not the Spirit," he says ; *i.e.*, "When the Spirit displays Himself in these abnormal ways, beware of repressing and discountenancing those who are the mediums of His supernatural action ; when God is speaking to you, through the mouth of these inspired disciples, do not make the attempt to reduce Him to silence. Quench not the flame, the burning flame, of the Spirit of the living God." Again, there were "prophesyings" in the ancient Church. These were either inspired teachings, reve-

lations of the Divine will, or else predictions of the future. The faculty of "prophesying" was held, it appears, in lower estimation than the faculty of speaking with tongues ; it was less showy, less startling. And consequently, those who had the gift of speaking with tongues, and perhaps the rest of the disciples with them, were under some temptation of looking down upon the less conspicuous, but really more useful, faculty of those who had only the power of communicating and interpreting the mind and will and purpose of God. Therefore St. Paul says, "Despise not prophesyings." But in both cases there was the danger of being misled by counterfeits. Men pretended to be influenced by the Spirit who were not really so. Animal excitement in some instances supplied the impulse of a supernatural enthusiasm, and the Holy Ghost was credited with utterances with which He certainly had nothing whatever to do. Just so with "prophesying." Statements were occasionally made by men who seemed to speak under

Divine inspiration, but who really spoke out of their own heart. Uncalled, unsent, uninspired by God, their teaching went only to the leading astray of feeble and uninstructed disciples ; and the Christian Church needed to be warned and put on its guard against them. We have, then, as you see, the other side of the Apostolic precept : “ Quench not the Spirit : despise not prophesyings ; ” i.e., be ready to recognize the work of the Spirit where He is really working. That is one side. But, at the same time, “ prove all things ; ” test the statements that are made, the prophecies that are uttered. All is not gold that is offered to you ; some base metal will be sure to be proffered to your acceptance. Be prepared for this. But, because a counterfeit is palmed upon you, or because an attempt is made to palm it upon you, do not, therefore, throw away the true and genuine substance in disgust. Learn to discriminate ; separate the true from the false, the pure metal from the dross ; reject the worthless, retain that which is valuable.

That is the other side: "Prove all things; hold fast that which is good."

I would ask you also to cast a glance at, or to remember, the remainder of the context. The Apostle assumes that the persons who are thus successful in separating the good from the evil, the precious from the vile, are not careless, indifferent people, wanting in the deeper earnestness, but those who "pray without ceasing" who "in everything give thanks," who "abstain from all appearance of evil." It seems to me important to bear this in mind, for here, as elsewhere in Holy Scripture, the power of discrimination is associated with a certain state of heart, with a certain moral and spiritual condition, and is regarded, by implication, as inseparable from it.

I. So much, then, for the passage; now let us endeavour to draw out its practical lessons. In the first place, it is obvious that the precept, "Prove all things," gives no countenance whatever to the idea of going out to search for a faith,

but presupposes a faith. We do not, then, gather from it that when men arrive at a period of life when they are capable of forming a judgment for themselves, and are inclined to do so, it is wise or right of them to sponge out the past, by which they have hitherto lived, and to treat the truths of religion as if they were open questions. Nor do I understand the Apostle to mean that we should rush out amidst all the opinions that are afloat in the world, and catching hold of one of them after another, examine whether it is worthy or not to be admitted into the sanctuary of our inner life. A man's whole existence would, obviously, be soon frittered away in such an occupation as this. What you and I want to do is *to live a life*—a righteous, pure, holy, Christ-like life (God helping us)—not to luxuriate in speculations. If others choose to indulge themselves in the dissipation of psychological scrutiny, in the examination of the whims and fancies of the human mind, very well;



let them do it ; but we have another task to fulfil : we have to live a life and do a work. What, then, would the Apostle teach us ? This, I think : that when new statements are proposed to us in such a way, so obtrusively as that it is our duty to examine them, we should examine them ; we should test and try them, and retaining that which is true, reject that which is false. It is far from our duty, Christian brethren, to go into the examination of everything that is proposed to our notice, of every book, for instance, which seems to proclaim a new view of human life and human duty. Settle it as an axiom, my younger brethren, that in questions of morality, in questions of conscience, your first thoughts, and not your second, are the best ; your first impressions are sure to be right. You are introduced to an agreeable companion ; his conversation is both instructive and fascinating ; his manners attract you ; but yet your better feeling says, "I am the worse for being in that man's company ; he does me no

good, but harm." Be sure, in such a case, that your instinct is pointing out to you what you ought to do. You ought to decline the acquaintance. Or, you begin to read a book that has been recommended to you; the first few pages reveal the character of the work; you feel that the perusal is leaving a soil, a moral taint, upon your mind. There your instinct is right; your first impulse is best. Drop the volume, and have nothing to do with it. So there are many cases in which our line is plain. "No investigation here!" is written up in broad, clear characters by our sense of right and wrong. And there are many, too, in which inquiry may be unobjectionable, but it is not expedient, for it has not been forced upon us. *You and I, brethren, cannot go about everlasting^{ly} asking questions;* but sometimes we must ask—sometimes we must make inquiry. Investigation is forced upon us by circumstances, and for our own sake, or, it may be, for the sake of others, we are bound to look into the matter.

Then we are to "prove" the thing, not to acquiesce in it and take it for granted. But how are we to "prove" it? Clearly, we must have some test. I want to ascertain how the wall I have just built lies; I must try it with a spirit-level and a plumb-line. I want to know if this thing which calls itself gold is really so; I pour aquafortis upon it. Yes, I must have a test to apply—a standard of appeal to which I may bring the thing whose character I want to ascertain. And can we doubt for a moment what Paul would have said about the standard of appeal? Paul was a man of great breadth of mind; his liberal sentiments were always bringing him into trouble. He was called "latitudinarian;" he was accused of being a man-pleaser; he was denounced as one who traitorously surrendered the truth of God to her enemies. And yet Paul, with all his liberality, invoked an anathema upon those who preached another Gospel, and upon those who loved not the Lord Jesus Christ. Take, then, the hint,

Christian brethren ; stand by the facts of the Gospel. I am not, myself, particularly solicitous that you should accept *man's theories about the facts* ; but as to the facts themselves, settle it in your minds firmly that they are facts. I see infinite importance in this. Some people tell us that it matters little what a man believes, provided he holds the belief conscientiously and sincerely. I would credit the statement if I saw it borne out by the analogy of the natural world ; but it is not so borne out. It matters to me greatly whether I believe rightly about the facts of the physical creation, about the facts which concern my body, about the laws which concern my health generally, about the way in which God has seen fit to arrange and govern this visible universe ; and I cannot but conclude that a right belief about the laws of the spiritual world, and the facts which concern my soul, should be of at least equal importance to me. I am unable to see how it should come to pass that mistake, which is so deadly in the one case, should be innocuous in the other.

You have your test, then, here, where the Apostle would have had you find it—in the revelation which is made to you in the Gospel concerning Jesus Christ, the Son of Man and the Son of God. But perhaps some one may say, “I am not quite so sure as you assume me to be about the truth of the Christian revelation. Opinions differ. I have not been able to make up my mind, and I cannot accept it as a test wherewith to try the truth of things.” Brethren, I think I may take for granted that in the great majority of cases (there may be exceptions), in the case of the great majority of those whom I have the opportunity of addressing in this church, there is, at least, an underlying persuasion that the facts of the Christian system are substantially what they represent themselves to be. Some of you may possibly wish Christianity not to be true; others may possibly think it fine to start sceptical objections; others, again, more earnest and thoughtful than these, may have real difficulties which they find themselves

at present unable to solve : but I will venture to assert that very, very few of you, in your secret hearts, really question the fundamental facts of the Gospel. I mean the facts, that God has sent His Son into the world to mix Himself up with human affairs, and that it is our relation to this Jesus Christ, the attitude which we assume towards Him, which determines what we are in the present, and what our destiny will be in the future. And, besides this, I put it to you, brethren, have not you, many of you at least, had this practical evidence in yourselves of the truth of the Gospel—that when you have brought your lives most in accordance with its teachings, you have been at your purest, your noblest, your best ; and that whenever you fell out of harmony with it, and so far as you did so, you felt as if you were placing yourself at a perceptible remove from the standard of perfection—you felt that you had fallen short of what a man might be and what a man ought to be ? Yes ; I shall venture to assume that the standard of the

Apostle Paul is our standard also, and that, in some way or other, we are willing, when we are really anxious about ascertaining the truth, to bring things to be tested by the revelation of Jesus Christ.

Now let us take another step. It is not enough to have a test to use ; we must be in the habit of using it. I have already pointed out to you that the precept of our text, or the permission or command to "prove all things," is found in the midst of graver assumptions ; that those who act upon the precept are men of prayer, of thanksgiving, of scrupulous purity of life. This circumstance suggests to me, that in order to apply this test with efficiency, we must acquire a certain delicacy of spiritual perception. It is hard sometimes to apply Scripture as a rigid rule to things which are suggested to us. But if a man is earnest and true of heart—if he is a student of Scripture, allowing his mind to catch, as it were, the flavour of its teachings—if he habituates himself to look for the guidance of the Holy Spirit—if he is anxious

to "do" the truth as well as to "know" the truth,—he insensibly, imperceptibly, contracts a kind of instinct by which, he hardly knows how, he is able to judge. I do not mean to say that he must rely on this alone—to do so were fanaticism; but it will be a useful adjunct and ally to the Word of God. By the employment of the two, he will be able to "prove" all things which are proposed to him to pass a judgment upon.

11. But I must dwell no longer on this part of our subject; I pass on to say a few concluding words upon the second division of our text: "Hold fast that which is good." Now, if there is one thing more than another that young men dislike, it is to be called "weak." To have it said of one, "He is a puny, feeble fellow; he will make no mark in the world; he never knows his own mind; he is led by everybody,"—is a sort of crowning insult. I know of many young men who would rather any day be called vicious than be called weak. And yet I

should like to know where strength is to come from, unless it comes from fixity of principle? and I should like to know where fixity of principle, in the highest matters, in the whole of life, is to come from, except from living faith in a living God? Brethren, do try to get true conceptions about this subject of strength and manliness; there is so much mistake about it. Many young men think it is unmanly to be religious. "Unmanly!" Let me tell you what is unmanly and what is manly. It is unmanly to be untrue to your convictions, to shrink from doing what you feel to be right, on account of the loss it may entail upon you, or the ridicule which you may have to incur. It is manly to take the side of duty, even if you should have to stand alone, with all your friends and companions against you. It is unmanly to enter upon a course of action of any importance, and then, from weariness or fickleness, or other motive, to abandon it. It is manly, when a worthy object is set before you, and you have once

started in pursuit of it, to hold on with a dogged and desperate tenacity, even to the end. It is unmanly to be a pledged soldier and servant of Jesus Christ, and practically to renounce your position. It is manly to abide by the side you have chosen, and to persevere in your Divine Master's service, through whatever opposition, from within or without, you may have to encounter. It is unmanly—it is a degradation of the humanity you wear—to live impurely, or even in easy-going self-indulgence. It is manly to exercise self-control, to be temperate and pure, to be true to the instincts of your higher life; it is manly so to live as not to be afraid to die. It is unmanly so to live as that when death comes you shall feel that the great work of existence is yet unaccomplished, and shall cry out for help to fit and prepare you for the awful presence of God.

Well, well, we, all of us, wish to be strong in will, in character—strong, not feeble, in thinking and in acting. And how is it to be brought about? *Only by*

working from a fixed centre. Let me tell you what I mean. Some of you understand mathematics ; now, what advance would a man make in the study of geometry if he consented to consider his axioms, his fundamental principles, his primary truths, as open questions? "None," you say, "none whatever." Some of you understand astronomy ; what progress would you make in that science should you consider it doubtful whether the theory of gravitation was true or not, and could not make up your mind about it? Again, none whatever. In other words, you must have a starting-point, a fixed centre, a fulcrum on which to rest your lever ; and then you can go on, and then you can work. And it is just so in spiritual things. You must start from a fixed centre. And what is that fixed centre? The truths of the Gospel, the facts of the relation between God and man. These must not be open questions ; you must be certain of them, if you want to have firm ground beneath your feet. Ay, and more than this : those facts must be facts *for you* ; you must

be able to realize your own personal concern in them ; you must be able to say, God helping you, "I know in whom I have believed." The life you are living in the flesh must be a life of some degree of faith in the Son of God. Then you are free to push your inquiries, and to accept or reject ; then real progress will be made in our higher life, by proving all things and holding fast that which is good. Brethren, it is the men of faith who are strong and advance; it is the men of no faith who are feeble, and who beat about, as far as spiritual things are concerned, in an endless cycle of incertitude and confusion.



The Cup of Blessing.

I COR. x. 16.

"The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?"

HE object of the Apostle in this portion of his Epistle is to warn the Corinthians against the dangers attending a free and familiar intercourse with the heathen, by whom they were surrounded. The city of Corinth, as you know, was proverbially pleasure-loving and licentious. The Christians in it would be exposed, and were exposed, to many temptations; and St. Paul had been apparently applied to to decide how far it was legitimate for those who professed allegiance to the Lord Jesus Christ to allow themselves to be mixed up with

the frequently-occurring festivities of the idolatrous population.

His reply seems to branch out in two directions. He begins (you will find this argument in the earlier part of the chapter) with instituting a comparison between ancient Israel—or “our fathers,” as he calls them—and their successors of the Christian Church. The Jews had that, he says, which corresponded to the Christian sacraments. In the first place, they had a baptism of their own. “They were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea ; and were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea.” That is to say, the Jews, resting under the shadow of the pillar of cloud, and passing through the Red Sea, may be said to have been baptized, for both the cloud and the sea consist of watery particles ; and these took the Israelites out of sight, and afterwards restored them again to view, just as the water does to the baptized—at least, where the practice of immersion is adopted. But the Apostle tells us that

they were “baptized unto Moses.” What does he mean? He means this: by that act of immersion in the sea and in the cloud, the Jews entered into solemn covenant with God, and became His Church, under the law as given by Moses. And in this respect there is a most perfect parallelism between their cases and ours. We have been baptized unto Christ, as they were baptized unto Moses; and we, by the act of our baptism, are bound in a solemn covenant with God, and enter into His Church, under the Gospel—the Gospel brought in, not by Moses, but by Christ, God’s own eternal Son. The Jews then had a baptism corresponding to ours. But the Apostle goes on: They “did all eat the same spiritual meat; and did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ.” By the “spiritual meat” he means the “manna” with which the Jews were fed during their journey through the wilderness; by the “spiritual drink” he means the water which flowed

forth from the rock when Moses smote it with his rod. Both the manna and the water were material substances, but being no mere ordinary physical productions, but miraculously given by God, and the work of His Spirit, the Apostle calls them "spiritual." Now, these two substances, thus supernaturally produced, and given for the sustenance of the covenant people of God, correspond, the Apostle argues, to the two elements, the bread and wine, used in the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper ; and to the Jew (only in a far more indistinct and covert way than with us) they symbolized the body and blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, and were, indeed, the means whereby he became a partaker of the Lord Jesus Christ.

But let us look at this point a little more closely, and do our best to understand it. The manna and the water were something more than mere material for the supply of bodily necessities. They were all this, of course, for the whole multitude of the Jews were fed in this way for many years ; but they had

also, when rightly used, a spiritual efficacy. This the Apostle very clearly implies. Now, what was this spiritual efficacy? *It was a partaking of Christ.* "They drank of that Rock that followed them : and that Rock was Christ." The careless, thoughtless, irreligious Jew saw nothing particular in what had befallen him when he came through the Red Sea ; it was only a lucky deliverance from the pursuing Egyptians—nothing more. When the manna fell, it was something for him and his family to eat ; when the water flowed, it was something for him and his family to drink,—it was nothing more. He perceived no meaning beyond that which lay upon the surface. But with the thoughtful, Spirit-taught Israelite, it was far otherwise. I do not mean to say that he could see things clearly,—of course, he could not—all as yet was veiled in deep shadow ; but to him, the supernatural events which had occurred to him would carry with them a noticeable significance. Coming through the watery walls of the sea, and emerging to

safety and to praise on the other side, he would feel that he had entered into a solemn covenant with the Lord God of Israel, of which this water-baptism of his was a sign and a seal. Then, on the other side there was provision waiting for him ; and this, again, was miraculously supplied. To him, then, the manna and the water would be something sacred. He would partake of them with reverence. Not only were they means whereby his bodily life was sustained, but they were means whereby he came into personal contact and communion with God, and drew from Him continual supplies of grace. He could not distinctly understand the signification, but he would see through the type into something beyond ; and his faithful employment of this supernatural aliment for His body would supply the needs of his soul by making him a partaker of Christ. That manna was Christ, and that rock was Christ ; and when he ate or drank, with his implicit and reverent though indistinct faith, there was a communication going on between the Saviour and

his soul. And here, implies the Apostle, we have the forerunner of the Christian Sacrament of the Lord's Supper. Just as Christian baptism was anticipated by the cloud and the sea, so the bread and the wine, symbolizing the body and the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, were anticipated by the manna that came down from Heaven, and by the water that flowed from the smitten rock. The Jews, then, brethren, had their second sacrament as well as we.

Now for the Apostle's argument founded upon this fact. All of them, he says, all, without any exception, were baptized in the sea, and partook of the manna and of the water ; but to the great majority of them their privileges brought no advantage whatever. God was not well pleased with them ; they were overthrown in the wilderness. And why was this ? Chiefly because they permitted themselves to be drawn into idolatrous practices by the surrounding nations. It was bad companionship that ruined them. "Now," reasons the Apostle, "do you Corinthians take warning from

your spiritual forefathers, the Jews. All these things happened unto them for ensamples, and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come. You, like the Jews, have been baptized, but by your baptism ye have entered into a higher and nobler covenant than theirs ; you, like the Jews, only in a way superior to them, have that other sacrament, in which ye may partake spiritually of the body and blood of Christ. In the bread which ye break, in the wine which ye drink, ye have the symbols of your Saviour's suffering, of your Saviour's resurrection-life in Heaven ; nay, more, ye have the means whereby, if ye partake in faith, ye may be drawn into closer and closer union with your living Head. Oh ! beware, Corinthians, lest, having all these privileges, you should be led aside from your steadfastness, as the Jews were, through the allurements of the world in which you are placed, and so come at last to be overthrown, as the Jews were, by the righteous judgment of God."

Such is the first branch of the Apostle's argument.

Let us pass on to consider the second. It is introduced by the words of our text : “The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?” And the underlying idea of the argument seems to be this : that the Holy Communion, when rightly used, helps to bring about a living oneness between us and Christ. We are united to Christ as members of His mystical body, and because united to Him, united also to one another. You observe that I say, “helps to bring about ;” perhaps I ought to say, if I wished to speak correctly, that it confirms and strengthens and draws more close the union *already existing* between the believer and Christ. But as with the former verse, so with this—let us endeavour to submit it to a careful examination.

I will ask you to notice, in the first place, the expression, “the cup which we bless,” “the bread which we break.” The Apostle, obviously, refers

to the whole congregation, not to the ministers of it; and the expression strikes at the very root of sacerdotal assumption. In the act of blessing—*i.e.*, of consecrating with blessing—the cup, the minister is simply the representative or agent of the congregation, who virtually, through him, blesses the cup. He has no transmitted authority of his own, but he acts merely in behalf of the believers present. Observe what follows if this be true. *It follows that the authority to consecrate the elements, which is supposed by some to belong to a certain religious caste, is really a matter of order, and nothing more.* Order is very important, and it would be most undesirable that anybody should carelessly or lightly intrude into an office for which particular persons have been set apart; but these persons being only the representatives of the congregation, and only doing acts which every believer is equally entitled to do, it is most certain that circumstances might arise which would justify a Christian

layman in administering the Holy Communion. Take, for instance, the case of a long sea-voyage, and a party of Christian people shut up in a ship without any minister of religion amongst them. If I understand St. Paul rightly, it is quite competent for one of these Christian people, acting as the representative and agent of the rest, to take the place of the officiating clergyman, and to consecrate and distribute the elements, as the clergyman would do were he present amongst them.

In the light of this thought, consider for a moment the remainder of the Apostle's statement. The blessing is a joint blessing—an act done by one in behalf of all. 'The breaking is a joint breaking, one breaking in behalf of all. The act of joint blessing, then, of the cup, together with the consequent drinking of it, is the act whereby we become participators of the blood of Christ. It is the "communion" of the blood of Christ. So with the bread. The joint blessing and the joint

partaking of the two elements constitute a seal of our already existent living union with Christ, and a means whereby we become partakers of Him, receiving into our souls out of the fulness of His resurrection-life. Now, the Apostle makes this union with Jesus Christ, and with one another—carried out, as I would have you remark, not independently of the Holy Communion, but by means of it—an argument why the Corinthians should abstain from all participation in idolatrous rites. The fact that they are one with Christ, and one with each other, excludes the possibility of their being implicated with either the practices or with the adherents of idolatry. “Ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord, and the cup of devils: ye cannot be partakers of the Lord’s table, and of the table of devils.” This is the Apostle’s second argument.

I. I draw rapidly a few obvious inferences. First, as to the importance of the sacraments—of both of them. You cannot have followed the course of

the Apostle's argument without perceiving that he takes for granted that both Baptism and the Lord's Supper are essential to the Christian life; the one being the sacrament of admission, the other the sacrament of growth. He looks upon both as necessary; he does not even entertain the notion of a Christian man attempting to live his life without the use of the Lord's Supper. The Jews all were baptized in the sea and the cloud; the Jews all fed of the manna, and drank of the water that flowed from the Rock. And all the people of Christ, in the Apostle's view, are expected to act as the Jews did, and, having entered into covenant with God by baptism, to maintain their position by a diligent, believing use of the means of grace. Is not this undeniable? It is. The Apostle, then, regards the Christian sacraments, not as mere signs or remembrances, but as essential, as necessary, to membership of Christ.

II. In the second place, although St. Paul puts

the Christian sacraments in a position of such importance, it is clear that he cautions us against supposing that the possession of these external privileges will insure salvation. He has no faith in the mere doing the thing. Baptism and the Lord's Supper—what are they without spiritual life? Nothing ; nay, worse than nothing—for the mere formality stupefies the conscience and ruins the soul. We have seen how the Apostle combats the idea of an external salvation. The Jews were baptized unto Moses ; they ate of the “spiritual” meat, and drank of the “spiritual” drink ; and yet the vast majority of them displeased God, and were overthrown in the wilderness. So, he said, might it be with the Corinthians ; and so, of course, might it be with us. Baptized, confirmed, partakers of the Lord's Supper, outwardly correct and decorous, we may yet be found to fall short of the kingdom of Heaven, and to lose the prize of eternal life. What is it, then ? There must be the spiritual life already begun, through the acceptance of Christ into the

heart ; there must be the union already cemented by faith ; and then, the use of the means of grace, by bringing us into personal contact with Christ Himself, feeds and nourishes and supports our souls.

III. Lastly, we come to the Holy Table not only to draw more closely the bonds of living union between ourselves and Christ, but also to realize more thoroughly the fact of our Christian brotherhood. Come into Christ, and you come into the circle of the family of God. "We being many," says the Apostle, "are one bread, [*i.e.*, one loaf] and one body." The union, the sympathy, the love existing, amidst all their petty differences and many imperfections, amongst Christian disciples, is realized more at the Lord's Table than elsewhere. We feel that we are indeed members of one body, and that our lot is cast together for eternity. Fellow soldiers in the great strife between truth and error, between good and evil—fellow pilgrims towards the city which hath foundations, and the fatherland which

is yet far off—children of the same Father, expecting to meet one day in the same Father's home—saved by one Saviour—servants of one Lord, drawing supplies from one life,—we are bound together for ever; and we feel the bond more than ever when we approach, in faith and penitence and hope and love, the sacred Table of the Lord.



Jacob and Esau.

GENESIS xxvii. 35.

"And he said, Thy brother came with subtlety,
and hath taken away thy blessing."



SHALL use this verse as a motto, and not as a text. I wish, not to enlarge upon any particular point in the history of Jacob and Esau, but rather to offer you a few plain and simple reflections which are suggested by the general narrative.

I. Now, perhaps the first thing which strikes us when we arrive at this portion of the Book of Genesis is the descent that has obviously taken place in the moral tone of human existence. With Abraham, the friend of God, the calm and almost faultless patriarch, the man of faith, who could nerve himself up, at the Divine command, to the sacrifice of a well-beloved son, we seem

to be breathing an atmosphere of the most exalted and ennobling sentiment; we are in the presence of a man of heroic mould, a person belonging almost to a different order of beings from ourselves. But in the tent of his son Isaac we feel that we have come down to the level of ordinary life. The characters are like our own. There is the same mixture of good and evil in them which we find in ourselves, which we find in the world around us; and in the jealousies and animosities, and the scheming and overreaching, in the loss of privilege by those who do not care to retain it, and in the retribution which slowly but surely overtakes unrighteous dealing, we observe the exact counterpart of the circumstances in which we ourselves are placed. Perhaps for this reason, the narrative with which we are now concerned, although less lofty than that which has preceded it, has a keener interest and a more penetrative teaching for us all. It is the biography of men like ourselves from which we are most likely to gather the most important lessons.

II. Let this stand for our first reflection. We pass on, in the second place, to a few comments upon the contrast presented by the two brothers, Jacob and Esau. Now I should imagine that few of us have not felt repelled at the beginning from the character of the calculating and somewhat unscrupulous Jacob, and attracted at the beginning towards the frank, impulsive, open-handed, generous, though somewhat hasty-tempered, Esau. Further consideration, however, has, probably, induced us to reverse our verdict. We have seen through the engaging superficiality of the one character, and have discovered the depth and power disguised under the unattractive exterior of the other. But let us look at the matter a little more closely. The difference between the two brothers lay chiefly in this—that Jacob believed, whereas Esau practically did not believe, in an invisible world, in a spiritual kingdom. Of the latter brother, the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews says that he was a “profane person”—not meaning, of course, that he was given to swearing

and blasphemy, or that he was, in any sense, of a scandalous life, but that he was what we should call "worldly;" his worldliness leading to a disregard and contempt, occasionally manifested, of religious obligation and religious privilege. We can easily picture the man to ourselves. A bold hunter, a keen sportsman, astonishing others by his feats of daring; a pleasant companion, frank and open; by both qualities drawing men of a similar spirit round him, and coming to be recognized as their chief; passionate when roused, and capable of a deadly, though not an enduring and implacable resentment; withal indifferent to religious duty, and though not proclaiming himself an unbeliever, yet, to all practical intents and purposes, disbelieving in the existence of an invisible world,—such was Esau.

In two chief incidents of his life he announced his character. First in his marriage. It was contrary to all the traditions of the chosen family, contrary to their

position in the land, and contrary to the well-known will of God, that any member of it should ally himself with the races of Canaan. But Esau was determined to take his own way in the matter. He would not be fettered in his choice by any religious scruples, or by the wishes of his parents; and he married women who were daughters of Hittites. Probably he was attracted by their beauty, or else it was convenient to marry women who were close at hand, or perhaps he thought an alliance with the neighbours amongst whom he dwelt a desirable thing. Anyhow, he put religion aside in the matter, and determined, in that most important step of life, to please only himself. The other incident was that of selling his birth-right. The birth-right, as you know, was, in the main, a spiritual privilege; it referred to blessings in the distant future, especially, as it appears, to the blessing of being a progenitor of Messiah. Well, for such a privilege as this Esau cared very little—very little indeed. It referred to

something future ; it had something to do with religion, he supposed. What was it worth to him ? And so, one day, when he came in from his hunting, weary and half-famishing, and found his brother preparing some savoury lentile soup, he was easily persuaded to exchange this birth-right, on which he set no value, for the mess of red pottage which satisfied his immediate needs. “ For one morsel of meat he sold his birth-right ; ” true to his character, as you see,—preferring present gratification to future advantage, postponing to the things of time the interests of the invisible and eternal kingdom.

Turn now to the younger brother. Jacob in this respect was precisely the opposite of Esau. He was a man who could have “ long patience,” and wait ; and he was a man who devoutly believed in the unseen, in religious duty, and in religious privilege. He saw that his brother despised the birth-right, and it occurred to him that the blessing might very properly be transferred to one who

valued it from one who valued it not. And the step was not far from this feeling to the setting his heart upon it, and to scheming and plotting for its permanent possession. We do not excuse Jacob; God did not excuse him, as we shall presently see. It is not, of course, for you and me to rise up in condemnation against one whom the lips of the Almighty pronounced blessed, and who came ultimately to be a “prince prevailing with God and with men;” we feel that we ought to speak reverently of the faults and sins of holy men of old; nor should we forget the difference between the twilight of the dispensation in which they lived, and the broad, clear light of Gospel-knowledge which we enjoy: but, at the same time, to refuse to see the unworthiness, the sin, of the patriarch’s conduct, would be both to do violence to our own moral sense and to lose the benefit of some of the most important teachings which the narrative is intended to convey. In no case, in no dispensation, can it be right to lie, to deceive, to cheat another out of

his due; in no case, in no dispensation, can it be right to do evil that good may come. Nay, and we may say more than this: we may say that, under all circumstances and at all times, generosity, unselfishness, self-sacrifice are more consistent with the truly religious character than the eager pursuit of one's own interest, and the greedy determination to serve oneself at the expense of our neighbour. Nevertheless, brethren, whilst you criticise the patriarch's conduct, I pray you to observe this, that his belief in the unseen, his faith in a living God and an invisible kingdom, his persuasion that not the things of time, but the things of eternity, were the true realities, were the strong cords which drew him up from the pit of duplicity and meanness, and made, at last, a holy man of him, fitting him to take rank with Abraham and Isaac, as one of the great heads of the chosen people. The superficial, worldly Esau—like other worldly persons—attractive at first sight, but not improving upon acquaintance, impulsive and impa-

tient, eager for present gratification, eats and drinks, and rises up and goes his way,—and there is an end of him, as far as all nobler purpose and all higher aim is concerned ; whilst the patient, pertinacious Jacob, ever ready to sacrifice the present to the future, ever looking forward to the Divine promise, passes through the stages of a purifying discipline, and lays the foundation of the Israel of God, and of the glorious work of redemption by Jesus Christ.

III. In the third place, I would notice, and ask you to notice with me, the *irrevocableness* of the step which Esau, in his reckless impetuosity, took in the matter of parting with his birth-right. In the Epistle to the Hebrews we read thus about him : “Afterward, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected ; for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears.” I understand, then, that when Esau, at his father’s command, went out with his weapons into the field to take some venison, he made no doubt

that the past had been condoned by God, and that he was about to receive the blessing attached to the birth-right. By this time he had come to value the birth-right more. When he parted with it years ago, he was young and thoughtless ; and some excuse might be made, he considered, for youth and inexperience. Now he is older and wiser, and has learnt to see things in a different light. Not, I suppose, that Esau had ceased to be a worldly man—not that he cared even now for spiritual position ; but still, it would be better, he thought, now that his old father was about to die, to secure for himself such advantages as were connected with his priority of birth. Accordingly, he set out with a light heart, thinking that the past had been forgotten or forgiven, and that all had come right ; and with a light heart he returns successful from the chase, and with a cheerful voice and confident demeanour, enters his father's chamber, to find that his sin has overtaken him and found him out, and that the blessing which

once he despised has been irretrievably wrenched from his grasp. The revulsion of feeling is tremendous ; the strong man lifts up his voice with a great and exceeding bitter cry, and bursts into a fit of prolonged and uncontrollable weeping. It is the anguish of a man who mourns over a fatal step that cannot be retraced—of a man who feels himself hunted down by a sin of the past which he has come to regard as dead and buried, but which starts up with a fearful vitality when least he expects it, and stands like a boding spectre across his path.

It is oftentimes so, brethren, with ourselves. There are sins of the past, sins of our youth, it may be—some reckless, wilful flinging-away of a Divine blessing, which we would fain persuade ourselves is forgotten now, or, at least, is capable of exerting no influence upon our present life. But we find that it is not forgotten. God has not forgotten it. We find that it is not dead ; it is living still, and living to harm us. There is mischief done which cannot be

repaired ; treasure squandered which can never be replaced ; there is a root of bitterness planted which is sure, sooner or later, to be cropping up. Have we thrown away God's gift of time ? It cannot be recovered. God's gift of health—who shall give it us back again ? Or have we lost the purity and freshness of our youth, and tainted ourselves with the contamination of the evil that is in the world around us ? The blackness of that shadow projects itself over the whole of our subsequent life, and is never to be entirely removed, not even by the grace of God. You will understand me. I am not saying that the door of hope is closed against us, whatever our sins may have been. God forbid ! I believe that the Lord is ever waiting to be gracious. I do not mean, indeed, to deny that men may sin so long and so desperately, and may harden themselves so hopelessly by continual rejection of the salvation of Christ, that their return to God may be an impossible thing ; but I believe that God, on His part, is ever ready and ever

anxious to receive them back again ; and that up to the very last He deals with them by His Holy Spirit, and pleads with them by the gracious invitations and offers of His mercy. “ Whosoever will, let him drink of the water of life freely.” I am not, then, limiting the mercy of God in Christ ; I am not speaking about the penalties which will fall upon the ungodly in the future world ; I am simply saying that with us, as with Esau, there are certain losses which can never be repaired, certain steps taken the consequences of which will pursue us down to the grave, certain things concerning which it is not possible to find a place of repentance, although we may “ seek it carefully with tears.”

IV. My fourth and last thought is somewhat akin to that which has just preceded, and it is this. On observing the lives of the holy men spoken of in Scripture, we find that God does not exempt His people from punishment because they are His people, but that when they transgress He invariably

visits them with the consequences of their transgression. Take, for instance, the case of David. To a superficial observer, David may seem to have been somewhat leniently dealt with, for his double crime of adultery and murder ; but look a little more closely, and you find that the whole of the royal offender's subsequent life was embittered and poisoned by the consequences of his sin. From that sad day of his fall, he never knew comfort again. The most hideous abominations were committed in his own household, and by his own children. The sword seemed never to depart from his house. A shadow was ever upon it. The rebellion of Absalom, with all its painful accompaniments, was distinctly traceable to that terrible transgression. In fact, David was being ever pursued and hunted down by the consequences of his sin in the matter of Uriah the Hittite ; the sin was ever starting up in bodily shape, and crossing his path. Or come to the Patriarch Jacob. Was his deceit practised against his aged father and his unsuspecting brother

ever condoned? Most assuredly not. He felt the consequences throughout the whole of his future life. In his enforced flight from home, at a time when he was past seventy years of age—in his separation from the mother he loved so dearly—in his hard usage at the hand of his covetous relative, Laban—in the deceits continually practised upon him who had so deceived others—in his hour of dire terror and anguish by the ford Jabbok—in the unruliness and falsehood of his sons, and their attempts upon the life of their younger brother,—in all this he felt that God was visiting him for his sin; he was never let alone; and at the close, he summed up the character of his life, when he stood before the ruler of Egypt: “Few and evil have the days of the years of my life been.” There is no encouragement here for God’s people to sin. And must we not draw the conclusion, Christian brethren, that even if we have given our hearts to God, and are living the life of faith in His Son, we must not expect exemption from the consequences

of transgression ? We must expect to suffer—to suffer pain, to suffer loss—if we do amiss. Hell, indeed, is out of the question for a Christian ; for the essence of hell consists in hatred of God's goodness, and in opposition to His holy will ; and the Christian has been reconciled to his Heavenly Father through Jesus Christ ; the Christian is in harmony and sympathy with God, through the indwelling Spirit—loving what God loves, and hating what God hates. But if the Christian sins, he will surely have to smart for his sin ; although his punishment, through God's mercy—indeed, we might say, through his very relation to God—will be turned into a heavenly discipline, purging him, that he may bring forth more fruit. And if the Christian be careless and indolent, he will suffer loss. If we are slipshod in our religion, if we are easy-going, careless about the use of opportunities, and the employment of the talents committed to our stewardship, depend upon it, we shall not be in the future kingdom what we might otherwise have

been. "What a man sows, that shall he reap," is the unchanging law of the spiritual kingdom. These, brethren, are the four principal reflections suggested by the narrative before us, and here I quit the consideration of the subject.





The First Heathen Queen of Israel.

I KINGS xxi. 23.

"And of Jezebel also spake the Lord, saying, The dogs shall eat Jezebel by the wall of Jezebel."

T is a very common and a very trite observation, that when we once begin to do that which is wrong, we never know how far we may be carried in the wrong direction. The path of evil is an inclined plane, and there is an unconscious acceleration about the steps of those who place themselves upon it which brings them, almost before they know where they are, to the very verge of the pit of destruction. If you will bear this very obvious fact in mind, you will understand why God is so exceedingly stern about the first deflection from the path of

rectitude. It is that upon which so much depends ; and for this reason an extra amount of difficulty is thrown in the way of the original deviation, and an extra penalty is denounced against those who set the example to others of going astray.

Now, last Sunday evening we observed that the name of the first king of the ten revolted tribes was spoken of in Scripture as especially infamous,—not on account of his revolt, for that was permitted, but on account of his establishing, from motives of policy, an unauthorized religious worship in his dominions. He had not, as you will remember, introduced the cultus of a heathen deity ; he still professed to reverence and to serve the Lord God of Israel, the Jehovah who had brought His people up out of the land of Egypt : but, inasmuch as he commanded the worship of the unseen God to be carried on in connection with visible emblems and images, he is stigmatized as “ Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin.” In fact, he had taken the first step in the wrong

direction, and thus had made himself responsible for all that was to follow. In the narrative brought before us by the lessons of to-day we find that the second step has been taken. The worship of a heathen god has been introduced, and with it a tide of abominable impurity—the inseparable accompaniment of such a worship—has poured in and overflowed the land. Side by side with the temple of Jehovah stand the temple of Baal and the grove of Astarte. Simultaneously with the hymns of David and the utterances of prophetic inspiration, rise up into the air the sounds of licentious or bacchanalian songs, imported from Phoenicia. True religion languishes ; and only seven thousand persons are left in Israel who have refused to fall in with the idolatrous frenzy of the hour, and who have remained true to the covenant God of their fathers.

The narrative, too, has brought before us the name of that remarkable woman who was the chief agent in this destruction of the Jewish faith, and who did

more than any other woman ever did to accelerate the downfall of Israel. It seems appropriate, then, as a sort of sequel to our subject of last Sunday, that we should devote our attention to-night to such an examination of the character and career and fate of Queen Jezebel as our time will allow. And this, accordingly, I propose to do.

Jezebel was a Phœnician. The little strip of country which gave her birth—a country lying, as you will remember, on the north of Palestine, and bounded by the Mediterranean on the one side, and by the mountain-range of Lebanon on the other—exercised in its day an influence quite out of all proportion with the extent of its territory. The Phœnicians were the great maritime and commercial people of the ancient world. They were famous, too, for the arts of colonization ; and from them sprang the city of Carthage, which, at one time, contended with Rome itself, and with apparently equal chance of success, for universal empire. This being the case, you will not be surprised to hear that

he Phoenicians were gifted with a fascinating kind of intelligence. Their wealth enabled them to devote leisure to education, and to the cultivation of the arts of peace ; and their commercial pursuits bringing them into contact with people of various minds and manners, imparted to them a breadth of view, a liberal tone of thought, which was exceedingly attractive. They were, emphatically, the keen-witted, adroit, ready-tongued, versatile, successful men of the time. Had godliness been numbered amongst their virtues, such neighbours as they were would have been of great service to the simple-minded population who dwelt upon the mountains of Israel. But their religion was not a desirable one. To the learned amongst them it was, we suppose, that identification of the Deity with the works of His hands to which the name of Pantheism is generally assigned ; whilst to the great bulk of the nation it appeared as the worship of nature, and of the productive forces of nature, under the symbols and emblems of an elaborate idolatry. It had its side of

cruelty, for the Phœnicians were notorious for burning children on great occasions in sacrifice to their gods ; and, of course, it had its side of impurity also. Indeed, the followers of Astarte, one of their objects of worship, indulged in a legalized and consecrated licentiousness beyond most other people of the then existing world, and beyond what it would be right for me to attempt to describe.

The proximity, then, which, under other circumstances, would have been a blessing, became a very serious danger ; and it was obviously part of the Lord's intention to draw within as narrow limits as possible the intercourse between the northern Jewish kingdom and their attractive neighbours in Tyre and Sidon. The barrier, however, was broken through, and in the following manner. Amongst the royal family of Tyre was a princess of the name of Jezebel. The stock of which she came was distinguished for its religious fanaticism and its furious temper ; her father, for instance, who had come to the throne by

the murder of his predecessor, uniting with his kingly office the office of high priest of the goddess, Astarte ; and Jezebel inherited, in their fullest development, all the qualities of her race. We may suppose, however, that in her younger days her character did not display itself so distinctly as was afterwards the case. We may suppose, too, that she was a brilliant, accomplished, beautiful woman ; and, consequently, that she was quite capable of throwing the spell of her fascination over any young man unfortified by religious principle, and unsecured by strong convictions, who happened to meet with her at her father's court. Such a young man was found in Ahab, son of Omri, King of Israel. He appears to have travelled to Tyre, between which and Israel a friendly relation subsisted, and there to have met with Jezebel. It is true that a marriage between a Jewish prince and the daughter of a Canaanite monarch had never hitherto been heard of; but the bonds of religious strictness, as we have seen, had

been already relaxed ; and to Ahab it seemed that the importation of broader sympathies and more liberal views from the people of Phœnicia would be an advantage to the nation over which he was destined to rule. The Jewish people, he thought, had been too exclusive and narrow-minded. It would be well for them to become acquainted with other modes of thought, and to realize that they, after all, were only a small portion of the habitable world. This feeling concurring with the partiality he felt for the daughter of the King of the Sidonians, decided the question, and the two were married.

They were young, we said, at the time, and their greatness was only in the future ; but after a few years had passed, Omri died, and Ahab ascended, without any difficulty or opposition, the throne of Israel. Then Jezebel's character began to display itself. Ahab, who had good points about him, though he was an irreligious man, became, by degrees, a mere puppet in her hands, and the ascendancy of his wife,

before long, was complete and undisputed. In the sacred narrative she comes forward prominently three times, and to these occasions I will direct your attention, for the purpose of putting in the clearest possible light before you the character of this remarkable woman.

I. On the first of these three occasions we find Jezebel threatening to destroy the life of the prophet, Elijah. The circumstances were these. When she came with Ahab to the throne, the first thing that she did was to establish in Israel the worship of her Phoenician gods,—a decided step for a foreign princess to take, and had she not had the weakest of men for a husband, she could not have taken it. But she did take it. She brought in nearly a thousand priests of the idolatrous superstition,—the prophets of Baal, four hundred and fifty; and the prophets of the grove—*i.e.*, the servants of the foul goddess, Astarte—four hundred; and she provided a table for them out of the public revenue. One

would have thought that this would have been enough; but, in addition to this, she slaughtered, without compunction, the prophets of the Lord—the men upon whom depended, as she knew, the maintenance of true religion in the land—and very few of them escaped her merciless and unsparing attempts at extermination. Well, let us give her the credit of thoroughness. The woman is in earnest; she is for no half measures. Possessed of all the fierce fanaticism of her race, she is persuaded of the truth of her religion, and determined to establish it in her adopted land at any cost. Poor, weak Ahab, knowing what is right, but not bold or firm enough to do it, is no match for his resolute and fanatical consort. He has simply to stand aside, and to let matters take their course. After awhile, comes the three years' drought, and then the reformation of Elijah. You heard all about it this morning. God interferes to uphold His own cause; and then the tide of popular feeling turns from Baal towards the

Lord God of His people, Israel. Elijah, taking advantage of the opportunity, has the prophets of Baal brought down to the brook Kishon, and there, apparently with his own hand, puts every one of them to death ; and the whole scene closes, as one would think, upon a decided triumph for the religion of Israel. Now, mark what follows ! Jezebel sends a message to Elijah, and tells him that tomorrow, about this time, she will take his life, as he has taken the life of her prophets. But what of that ? Why should Elijah care for the threats of Jezebel ? Nay, it is she that ought to be alarmed. The people are with Elijah ; Ahab is cowed ; the religious sentiment of the nation is aroused. What if Elijah should push his advantage, and demand the life, or at least the expulsion, of the heathen princess who has wrought so much mischief in Israel ? The thing is not altogether impossible, and Jezebel may well tremble at the thought in the recesses of her ivory palace. But trembling is not in Jezebel's line. Perfectly un-

daunted, she sends her message, and Elijah quails before it. Yes ; Elijah—who was the servant of the most high God—whose spirit had been nursed for years in solitary communion with the unseen Jehovah—who was a man of iron nerve and unbroken resolution—who had just been the instrument in accomplishing the most remarkable revolution ever heard of in Israel—who had swept his enemies out of his path by one fell blow, and planted himself upon the ruins of the fallen religion,—Elijah quails before the message of the infuriated queen, and when he hears it, arises and flees for his life. Take the measure of Elijah, Christian brethren, and then judge how awful the woman must have been who was able, even in a moment of passing weakness, to strike terror into the prophet's soul !

II. The next occasion on which Jezebel appears is mentioned in the chapter from which my text of to-night has been taken. It appears that Ahab had set his heart upon a little plot of ground situated near his

great palace at Jezreel, and belonging to a man of the name of Naboth. The little patch would have just done for a garden of herbs,—it would have made the king's garden complete ; and nothing doubting that the owner would be willing to part with it for a consideration, the king sent to offer him liberal terms. He would either give him a better piece of ground, or as much money for it as he chose to ask. But, to his utter astonishment, the sturdy landowner refused to meet his sovereign's wishes. He would not, he said, on any consideration whatever sell the inheritance of his fathers ; certainly, he would not help, in any way, to contribute to the aggrandizement of an idolatrous monarch. Religion, then, seems to have entered into the question. "The Lord forbid it me, that I should give the inheritance of my fathers unto thee." Displeased and humbled at this rebuff, Ahab—it was quite in keeping with the miserable weakness of his character—took the matter so much to heart, that he took to his bed and refused his food. Just imagin

the monarch of a large and important kingdom acting the part of a great baby, and puling and whining and going to bed, because he could not have his own way ! What a close relationship there is between weakness and wickedness But Ahab was soon helped out of the difficulty by Jezebel. Ahab had scruples, but Jezebel had none. Ahab was not a godly man, but his religious education, as a Jew, made him hesitate at things about which his idolatrous wife had no misgivings whatever ; and, like other men of the same stamp, although he would not commit a crime, at least not a crime of a certain sort, yet he would not refuse to profit by the crime when another had committed it. The thing was soon done. "Lend me your royal seal," said his wife. "What do you want it for ? I hope you mean no harm." "Of course I don't," retorted Jezebel. "But ask no questions ; leave the matter to me, and let me have your seal." The king lent it. He was not guilty. Oh, no ! What was there wrong in lending your seal to your wife ?

He did not know what was going to be done with it ; that was his wife's affair, and not his.

And Jezebel took the seal, and with it Jezebel signed letters that she had written in Ahab's name ; and in consequence of these letters, a solemn farce was enacted in Jezreel. (Jezebel had been long enough in Israel to understand the forms of the Jewish law.) A fast was proclaimed. A dreadful thing had happened. Some one in Jezreel had blasphemed God and the king. Who was it ? who could it be ? "Let us fast and pray, as Israel did when the guilt of Achan had to be discovered. Perhaps the Lord, in His mercy, will point out the offender to us, and we shall be able to put away the sin from our midst." And they fasted and prayed, these virtuous, godly men. And presently, two other virtuous and godly men, oppressed with a load upon their consciences, and jealous for the honour of Jehovah, came forward, reluctantly, as they said, to give evidence. They were constrained to speak. The

offender was—Naboth. “Naboth!” exclaimed the bystanders, who were not in the plot; “Naboth! the last man in the world to be guilty of such a thing.” “Alas!” exclaimed these godly and virtuous witnesses, “it *is* Naboth. These ears of ours have, unwillingly, heard his fearful blasphemies.” There was no help for it, then. All the forms of the law had been complied with; the two witnesses, prescribed by the Mosaic law, had given their witness; and the innocent Naboth and his innocent sons, involved with him in the capital charge, were dragged outside the walls of the city, and stoned to death, as convicted blasphemers. Thus the way was made clear. The property of Naboth was forfeited to the Crown; and Ahab, who had, of course, nothing to do with the murder, went down the next day to take possession of it. But, on the very ground itself, whom should he meet but Elijah, armed with the curses of the Lord! The prophet had recovered from his momentary fear of Jezebel, and went down to the vineyard

to confront the guilty pair. In the flush of their triumph, their sin finds them out, and the male-diction of the Most High rolls fearfully over them. Ahab's entire posterity shall be cut off. He might have been the founder of a powerful dynasty ; as it is, not a soul shall be left to bear his name. He and his shall be utterly exterminated. And as for Jezebel, the author and instigator of this, and of so much other mischief, the dogs shall tear her flesh, queen as she is, and devour her, by the side of the wall of Jezreel. Look at the scene, brethren ! Ahab crouches and cowers before the storm of the Divine wrath, but Jezebel stands erect, scowling at the prophet, hard, impenitent, unmoved, defiant, to the last.

III. We have a third scene to place before you. Ahab has been dead fourteen years. With all his faults, he was not wanting in courage, and he was slain by a chance-arrow at the battle of Ramoth-gilead. For fourteen years, then, Jezebel, acting as queen-mother, has guided the counsels of her

son, and has been, what she was throughout, a curse to the people of Israel. As far as man can see, her position is secure; as far as man can see, there is no prospect of the fulfilment of the prophet's prediction concerning her. But now the avenging clouds begin to gather. A conspiracy is formed against her son, which seems likely to be successful. It *is* successful. Her son is slain; and Jehu, the son of Nimshi, at the head of an irresistible force, drives furiously to the city of Jezreel, to take possession of the throne. Jezebel is there—in the palace. Does she quail, the aged queen? No; it is not in her nature to quail. She knows that her hour has come, and she goes unflinchingly forth to meet it. The palace at Jezreel was just by the city gate—that gate which the triumphant victor was nearing. The aged princess arrays herself in her royal attire, that she may look every inch the queen, and meet her end becomingly, and, opening the broad window, stands at it, that she may salute Jehu on his approach.



And what a flood of memories may have come across her at such a moment ! for it was to this palace that Ahab brought her, years and years ago, a young and lovely wife ; it was here that her children were born. And, alas ! just below her, just outside the walls, lies the little vineyard of Naboth, which it had cost her so much to possess. Well, Jehu drives furiously up ; but as he draws nigh, he is arrested by the taunting words of Jezebel : " Had Zimri peace, who slew his master ? " She might have asked the question of herself, but she did not. Jehu looks up from his chariot, at the majestic figure standing at the open window. Asking if there are any in the palace on his side, and receiving an answer in the affirmative, he bids them throw Jezebel down. They do so ; and her blood stains the walls as she dashes heavily down, and rolls before the hoofs of the horses. Then he completes the work of destruction by driving over her prostrate body, and crushing her under his wheels. The matter seems to have passed from his mind for the time,

but, some hours after at the banquet, he was seized with some sympathy for the downfall of so much greatness, and sent messengers to bury her. They returned to say that the dogs outside the walls had literally torn her body to pieces, and devoured her. And thus the curse of the prophet was fulfilled : “The dogs shall eat Jezebel by the wall of Jezreel.”

IV. I put together hastily a few conclusions from the narrative which we have thus been considering. First, it never answers to attempt to be wiser than God. For good reasons God forbade alliances between His own people and the people of Canaan, and Ahab smarted for slighting the prohibition. When the godly and the ungodly unite, the result is never a prosperous one. Then, sooner or later, guilt comes home to the perpetrator of it. The man escapes for the time, but is sure to be visited at the last. Again, God avenges His own servants. You cannot injure a servant of God without suffering for it ; not now perhaps, but by-and-by you will hear of the matter again.

And lastly, we are taught by the narrative the ultimate destruction of those who oppose themselves to the living God. I care not what they are—thinkers, politicians, statesmen, philosophers,—there is no weapon that is formed against the Lord that can prosper; and there is no antagonist, however mighty in strength or in intellect, who exalts himself against Him, but will ultimately be crushed beneath the chariot-wheels of His almighty power.





Many Infallible Proofs.

1 COR. xv. 6.

"After that, he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep."



OR a Sunday or two past the Epistle has been selected from St. Paul's former Epistle to the Corinthians, and to-day the subject suggested by this portion of the service is that of the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. I take the opportunity thus presented to me, and propose to speak to you about the Resurrection. I shall not hesitate to repeat what I have already said on former occasions, when this particular topic has encountered us; although I hope, for the most part, to be enabled to lead you into an entirely new field of thought respecting it.

I. In the first place, then, permit me to remind you

of what is an incontrovertible inference from the writings of St. Paul, that the resurrection of Christ was believed in by the whole Christian community, and formed the groundwork of the existence of the Church, *within less than ten years after the Crucifixion*. I am anxious that you should attach some importance to this fact, and that you should carry it away in your memories. You and I, of course, believe that the Christian Church was based upon the resurrection of the Saviour from the very beginning; you and I are sure that, from the very first, men and women were drawn together into a religious body because they were persuaded that Jesus Christ, Who was crucified on Calvary, had been raised up from the grave, and had ascended to the right hand of the Majesty on high. But in the present day there are not a few—and you may meet with them in social intercourse, or, at least, you may meet with them in the current literature of the time—who traverse this statement or persuasion of ours with a distinct and emphatic denial. Aban-

doning the old sceptical ground, admitting that the early Christians were not conscious impostors, who maintained and propagated a falsehood which they knew to be such, these persons represent the disciples as the victims of a singular delusion. Some of their number, they tell us, had entertained a conviction that their Master would rise again from the dead. This conviction, acting upon weak and enthusiastic temperaments, wrought out its own fulfilment. Something was seen which was supposed to be an appearance of Christ, and which was taken for a reality ; and the rest of the disciples, influenced by the fanaticism of their fellows, gradually adopted the idea of a resurrection, and incorporated it into the creed of the Christian Church.

Now, this theory of the origin and development of the idea of a resurrection is simply at variance with the facts of the case. To begin with,—if anything may be clearly deduced from the sacred narrative, it is this, that the disciples were not expecting the rising-again

of the Lord, and that they were quite as incredulous about it, even when evidence was brought before them, as were the most decided opponents of His person and His doctrine. But, putting this fact aside, the theory supposes that within a period of confessedly less than ten years, a fiction—a fiction, too, which exposed those who maintained it to obloquy and persecution and loss—grew to be accepted as a reality by hundreds and thousands of reasonable people, came to lie at the foundation of their faith, to colour their feelings, to mould their language, to influence their devotions, to guide and animate their lives, and to sustain them with cheerful hope when they entered the dark valley of the shadow of death. Ten years, less than ten years, for the growth and consolidation of such a fiction as this ! Why, the thing is preposterously inconceivable, and nothing short of the bottomless credulity of scepticism could give acceptance to the thought for a single moment.

Remember, then, I pray you, brethren, the circumstance which I have thus recalled to your recollection. By the confession of the opponents of revealed religion—for none have ventured to deny the authenticity and genuineness of St. Paul's letters to the Galatians, the Corinthians, and the Romans,—by the confession of the very opponents of revealed religion themselves, the Church of Christ, within ten years after the crucifixion of Christ, accepted, and based itself upon, the belief of His resurrection. How did such a state of things come about? The theory of conscious imposture has long been abandoned as utterly untenable; the theory of unconscious delusion, leading to the acceptance of a myth by a large body of people, within the space of less than a decade of years, is really too absurd to be seriously maintained. What remains, then, but the view which has always been maintained by the Christian Church, which is indeed the very keystone of the arch of doctrine upon which it rests—that the miracle of the resurrection is an actual and

accomplished fact ; that Christ, Who died for our sins, according to the Scriptures, Who was buried in the grave, did indeed rise again from the dead on the third day, and enter into the glory of His eternal life in the heavens ?

All this I have discussed with you on previous occasions ; the extreme importance of the topic must be my justification for introducing it to your notice again. I pass on now to consider with you, still in connection with the subject, that the Saviour, after His resurrection, showed Himself, not to all the people, but to certain witnesses selected for the purpose ; and I will endeavour to point out what reason there may have been for this particular method of procedure.

II. Now, it might possibly occur to us that if the Saviour had showed Himself to the people after His rising—again from the dead—if He, Who was seen by thousands to expire on the cross, had appeared to those thousands, three days after, a living man,—He

would have taken the most effectual method of overthrowing opposition, and of establishing the kingdom which He came to set up upon earth. But to adopt such a view would be to forget the spiritual nature of the work of Christ. Had it, indeed, been the Saviour's intention to crush His enemies by bringing them at once to judgment, He would probably have manifested Himself to the people generally in His resurrection-glory. But he had no intention of the kind. His desire was, not to tread His enemies under His feet, but to win them to Himself, to bring them to belief in His name, to lead them to salvation, or, at least, to give them the opportunity of repenting and turning from the error of their ways; and this could best be done by the method which He saw fit to employ—the method of exhibiting Himself to certain chosen and trustworthy witnesses, and then leaving it to them to make known the fact of His resurrection to all who were willing to believe it.

For, consider for a moment, Christian brethren.

We have no reason to suppose that the miracle of the resurrection would have produced a greater or more permanent effect upon the Jews had it been presented to them, than did the other miracles which, from time to time, the Saviour wrought among the people. That these other miracles were failures, we know well enough. When Christ supplied the hunger of some five thousand men with a handful of food, He was met with cavils and objections, instead of an acknowledgment of His supernatural pretensions, from the very persons who had partaken of His bounty. When Lazarus was raised from the dead, there were those, indeed, who were led by the miracle to believe in the Messiahship of Jesus, but the effect produced upon others was to induce them to hurry off to the chief priests, and lay information against the wonder-working prophet of Galilee. And, doubtless, a similar result would have followed a manifestation of the risen Christ to the general multitude. It would have been still open to

them to deny that Christ had ever been dead, and some would have denied it; it would have been still open to many to question the reality of Christ's bodily nature, and they would have questioned it; and, by the very nature of the case, it would have been impossible to give to thousands and tens of thousands in the space of forty days that convincing, that overwhelming evidence which was granted to the more limited body of Christian disciples. Accordingly, we find the Saviour working in this matter upon His usual lines. It has always been the Divine plan to train and educate a few, and then to bring their agency to bear upon the many. This plan was not departed from in the present instance. In the time which elapsed between the Resurrection and Ascension, the Saviour, by His various appearances, was preparing His disciples to be witnesses to the great fact that He had risen again from the dead. Armed, then, with this testimony, they went forth to proclaim the

Gospel; and their preaching drew like a magnet—drew out of a corrupted and corrupting world those souls to whom the resurrection of Christ was a message of hope, a fulfilment of dimly-entertained anticipations—and the first foundations of the Christian Church were laid.

III. Let me ask you to consider, in the next place, the nature of that evidence of the Resurrection which was given to the disciples. We are sometimes told, brethren, that investigation in those earlier days was managed in a very imperfect and unsatisfactory manner—that the laws of evidence were not fully understood; and it is even hinted that if the “so-called miracles” of Jesus Christ were submitted to the examination of a committee of modern scientific men, they would be found to lose much, if not all, of that claim which they put forth for our acceptance; in other words, that what passed for a miracle two thousand years ago would be easily discovered to be anything but miraculous if it should happen amongst

us now. But just let us think. There is a certain kind of evidence upon which human affairs are conducted in the present day, quite as much as in the time of the early Christianity. For instance, not one of you, I presume, would hesitate to state upon oath to-morrow in a court of justice, if it were necessary, that I, the preacher, was alive to-day. Even supposing that you knew me to have been dead, and that you had seen me die,—you would still be sure that I had been, on that particular Sunday morning, a living man before you. I had not just flashed, a sudden apparition, into the field of your vision, and then disappeared; I had remained with you in the same building, visible, for the greater part of two hours. I had not been silent, but had spoken, and you had recognized my voice. Look, manner, gestures, tones, all were familiar to you. You were certain it was the man you knew. Though it was hard to understand how I should be alive after having been dead, yet *as to the matter of fact* there could be no manner of

question. The evidence of your senses was not to be gainsayed. There, on that Sunday morning, in the open day, in the well-known place, the man was alive before you ; and though you are no committee of scientific inquirers, you would be as positive of my existence as you are of your own ; and you would be—mark this—you would be as positive even if you had seen me die, and had helped to lay me in the grave. You would uphold the truth that I was alive on that particular Sunday morning,—in spite of all the ridicule you might have to encounter, and all the loss you might have to sustain, for entertaining the belief. You would require no scientific investigation to satisfy your minds. And yet—and I pray you to notice this—you have not the same amount of evidence of the fact of my existence that the disciples had of the existence of the Lord Jesus Christ. You see me, you hear me, this morning ; but the Saviour allowed the disciples to touch Him, to handle His sacred body, that they might assure themselves that it was no phan-

tom which stood in their presence, but He Himself, their well-known and dearly-loved Master. More than this : He ate and He drank with them ; He took a piece of a broiled fish and of a honeycomb. More than this still. According to my supposition, you see me once, and are convinced of my being alive ; but the disciples saw the Saviour many times, under many different circumstances. He appeared to individual disciples, to Mary Magdalene, to Cephas, to James, as we learn from the passage to which our text belongs ; He showed Himself to two disciples as they journeyed to Emmaus, and conversed with them for a considerable time ; He appeared to the Apostles when Thomas was absent ; He appeared to the Apostles when Thomas was present, and their number was complete. Then, as St. Paul informs us, He was seen by more than five hundred brethren at once, most of whom were still living at the time when the Apostle wrote his first letter to the Corinthians. And these, remember, were not transient appearances ; the

Saviour, on every occasion, remained long with His disciples, giving them many directions, imparting to them much important instruction. In fact, during those forty days which elapsed between the Resurrection and Ascension, not a particle of evidence was withheld which would tend to convince the disciples of the reality of the Saviour's resurrection-life; nor was a single method left untried which should fit and prepare them to be witnesses of the great fact, in the face of an opposing and gainsaying world.

Observe, then, what follows. *If we are not to believe in the resurrection of Christ on the strength of such evidence as was granted to the early Christians, we have literally no means of ascertaining the truth of events that occur now in our ordinary every-day life.* The business of life must come to a standstill. Certainly, our courts of justice must be closed, for no witness and no amount of witnesses will be competent to establish a matter of fact. Or, to put the thought

in another form,—so long as causes which concern the property and reputation of our fellow-men are decided by such evidence as is now accepted in our courts of law—so long as the life or death of an accused person, standing at the bar of judgment, hangs upon the testimony of men making no pretension whatever to scientific acumen, but having merely the ordinary use of their sense and their senses,—so long will it be inexcusable to withhold our assent from the resurrection of Christ, on the ground that the testimony on which it rests is not such as to satisfy the stringent requirements of the modern method of scientific investigation.

III. But I pass on to a concluding reflection—a reflection suggested by the subject, and quite of a piece with it. We have seen that the Saviour, instead of appearing publicly, propagated His Gospel by means of selected and prepared agents, whose great business it was to be witnesses to the world at large of the fact of His resurrection. I wish to add to the thought

this further one, that He is propagating His Gospel by the self-same method now. He is employing persons who are persuaded of the truth of His resurrection, so persuaded as that their lives are modelled and moulded upon it, to act upon the great mass of their fellow-men, and to draw out into a separate company those who are of the truth and who love the truth. It may be said—not inaccurately, I think—that belief in the resurrection of Christ constitutes the Christian disciple. Of course, I do not mean a mere traditional, educational, notional belief, but a belief which enters into the being and influences the life—a heart-belief—a belief inspired and maintained by the constant operation of God the Holy Ghost. *The life which is based upon the resurrection of Jesus Christ is the distinctively Christian life.* And the reason is not very difficult to find. The great danger which besets us all is that of worldliness ; not perhaps so much sin, in the ordinary acceptation of the term, as worldliness—the making this present passing scene the real object and end of existence ;

the choosing the pleasurable instead of the right ; the glittering falsehood instead of the plain, unpalatable truth ; the transient instead of the eternal. This is what I understand by "worldliness." To this danger we are, all of us, exposed, and from it we have to be delivered. Now, we are delivered by belief in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. This opens up to us another, a spiritual world, and gives reality and power to it, and enables us to live as citizens of Heaven, breathing its atmosphere and manifesting its spirit, whilst we move amongst the occupations and pursuits of this lower earth. The Christian life, then, I say, is based upon the fact of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and the Christian himself is sustained and supported by the Saviour's resurrection-life in Heaven. It is not meant that the Christian disciple withdraws himself from the ordinary occupations of men, or despises them,—far from it. He considers nothing that is human alien to himself. What interests his fellow-men interests him. But the spirit in which he engages in

the duties of life, the view which he takes of them, the motives which inspire him, the maxims he follows, are essentially and unavoidably different from those of others ; and this difference is brought about by his living belief in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and in all that that resurrection involves. When we say, then, as we may do, that Christ is acting upon the world through Christian people, we are, in fact, saying that He is acting upon those who do not, practically, believe in His resurrection, by means of those who do. And this is precisely the method of propagating His Gospel which He employed in the earlier days. Then, He sent forth chosen men and women to be witnesses of the great fact of His rising again from the dead ; He does so now. And it may not be inappropriate or unnecessary, Christian brethren, if we remind ourselves that the power of our witnessing will depend upon the vividness with which we realize for ourselves that Christ has risen, and that we, His followers, have risen in Him. We cannot,



indeed, do as the early disciples did—we cannot speak of seeing Christ, and hearing Him, and touching Him, and conversing with Him, after He rose again from the dead ; this testimony is not for us to bear, nor is it necessary for the world, as matters stand now : but what is necessary is, that we should show by our life that the resurrection of Jesus Christ is a great reality, a living power, even now ; that we should let men see that there is such a thing as rising above the world and seeking those things which are with Christ at the right hand of God ; and this, Christian brethren, we are perfectly competent, God helping us, to do.



